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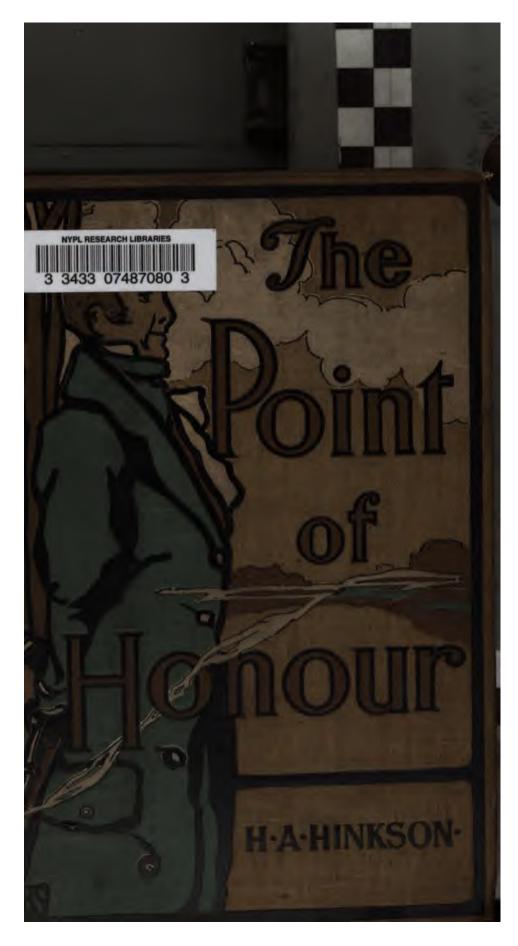
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# THE POINT OF HONOUR

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### THE

## POINT OF HONOUR

Being some Adventures of certain Gentlemen of the Pistol, including those of the notorious Sir Phelim Burke

### By H. A. HINKSON

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AUTHOR OF "THE KING'S DEPLY"," "O'GRADY OF TRINITY,"
"UP FOR THE GREEN," ETC.



CHICAGO

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# TO WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY Poet, Playwright, and Critic

Victrix causa deis placuit sed victa Catoni

These men once lived and had strenuous lives. The blood that was in them was generous as the wine that enriched it. They feared neither the buttered claret at night, nor the blaze of a pistol in the morning, and their honour was as untarnished as the bright steel of their sword blades. Horses and dogs were their friends, and the air of the hills made their hearts glad. The saddle was their cradle, point-blankers were their playthings. Some of them loved women; near all of them would have fought for a woman, with or without cause.

Now they are dead and the race is no more. Their fame is but a memory, and of the deeds which they did only the winds speak, as they moan in the Valley of the Pines or sweep over the Shepherd's Crossing and through the Hunter's Gap to where the Well of the Three Sisters lies deep in the shadow of the mountain.



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### THE POINT OF HONOUR

### CHAPTER I

#### **CHERRY**

Which recounts how young Tony Bagenal wedded a Serving Lass, and won his Uncle's Blessing

Twas but three days since I had met Rody Macnamara in the Friar's Field, with point-blankers and twelve paces between us, and left a ball in his hip. He fell swearing he loved me, and, whether he lived or died, he was proud to be hipped by his dearest friend. So I kissed his cheek and helped the physician to carry him to his coach. The quarrel was trivial for so much blood-letting, yet it had seemed grave enough when our blood was heated with wine and our mouths full of boasting.

Since I was my uncle's heir I must needs sustain the honour of my family, for Sir Miles Bagenal had met his friends as often in the dawn with pistols as he had pledged his love for them in buttered claret. So it was that he had few friends left, since his hand had been steady and he had shot as straight as he had ridden to hounds, and had it not been that the gout crippled him so that he could no longer draw a hair-trigger, I make no doubt he would have had none but enemies to curse in his old age. Thus I received from his hands his reporters, Spitfire and Flash, and swore that I would follow in my uncle's steps.

Now, albeit I was near as proud as Sir Miles that I had hipped Rody Macnamara, yet in my heart I was right glad when the physician told me that he would be well again in a few weeks, and that the claret would give him back the blood that he had left in the Friar's Field.

It was near midnight when I leapt into the saddle and set out for my home at Kilfenora. The night was fresh and the air sweet, and, leaving the reins slack, I was fallen into thought

concerning the ways of my ancestors, remembering that I was pledged to do as they had done—drink with my friends at night and shoot them in the morning. Suddenly, a little way ahead of me, I heard the report of a pistol, and, in a moment after, the cry of a woman's voice, praying help or mercy.

I drew my sword and, putting spurs to my horse, dashed down the road. Before me I saw a coach, and a man on horseback by it. Then the door opened and a woman stepped from it. She turned suddenly and, stretching out her hands to me, cried "Help, help!"

"Have no fear," I cried; "while Tony Bagenal lives no woman shall need a sword nor want a lover." With this I rode at the fellow, but, as our swords crossed, he swerved aside, and, spurring his horse, galloped away as though the devil were at his heels.

"Let him be," I cried; "the rope is fitter for his neck than the sword for his breast, since he turns his back upon it!" Then I threw myself from the saddle, and, sweeping off my hat, made her a low bow.

"Tony Bagenal of Kilfenora begs leave

to offer you his services," I said, striving to see if her face matched her voice, which was very sweet.

At this she drew back, seeming much confused. "You are mistaken, sir," she answered, and I could have sworn that there was laughter in her voice, "for I have no claim on a gentleman's services, seeing that I myself am but a serving-maid, and serve my mistress."

- "Your mistress!" I exclaimed, for I could see none to answer the description.
- "It is true, sir; I am Madame Murchison's serving-maid, and I trust, sir, that I am faithful."
- "'Twere a sin to doubt it," I exclaimed;
  "I would pledge my honour upon your fidelity."
- "You are reckless of your honour, sir," she returned, "and yet so brave a gentleman must needs set great store by it."
- "By my faith! that I do," I cried, "and here is my pledge," and I would have kissed her, for her lips were tempting. But she drew back with a gesture that would have been haughty in one better born.

"'Tis a pledge easily given and forgotten as readily, when a gentleman would make a poor lass pay for his services at the cost of her modesty. My mistress will thank you more fittingly."

"Aye, your mistress," I returned, in some bewilderment, for I had completely forgot her mistress; "and where may she be?"

"She lies in the coach, and, I fear me, near dead of terror, since the rogue's voice was threatening and my mistress is used to gentleness."

"That I can well believe, since her maidservant is of so great a modesty and gentleness," I returned.

She made me a courtesy, and again I could have sworn that there was mockery in her eye. She did not answer me, but pointed to the coach. I looked into it and saw huddled up the form of a woman, who, seeing me, cried out in terror, so that I had much ado to comfort her, bidding her have no fear, since I was sworn to protect her. As I said so I fancied I heard a low ripple of laughter behind me, but I could not tell for sure.

At length the lady was sufficiently recovered from her alarm to rise to her feet and alight from the coach. She thanked me in a weak and quavering voice for my protection, yet I saw that she was ill at ease, and regarded me with no little suspicion.

"If you are indeed a man of honour," she said, "you will see us safely to the nearest inn."

"I have been accounted such, and you shall have proof of it, for mine host of the Eagle will give you of his best—that I promise you."

"I am sore shaken," she went on querulously, "and my bones ache as though I had a fever. 'Twas a foolish escapade and I a fool to be a sharer in it. God send us shelter, and that speedily."

"The gentleman has pledged his honour to find it, Madame," the girl broke in, a trifle impatiently.

"The Eagle is but two miles away," I returned, "and in half an hour you shall be there."

Then I looked about for the driver of the coach, but could see none.

"The rascal fled at the report of the pistol," the girl exclaimed; "yet I think his loss can easily be borne, since a coward is a sorry travelling companion. Will Madame be pleased to enter the coach?"

"God forgive me for my folly," said the lady, "for who is to drive the coach?"

"If the gentleman will drive the coachhorses," her maid-servant returned, "I will make shift to sit in his saddle if he will trust me with so sweet a creature."

Truly, I thought, this is a most wonderful serving-lass, and deserves a better mistress than this parchment-faced, querulous dame.

"Roger will be proud to carry so much courage and beauty," I whispered; to which she made no answer. Then I lengthened the right stirrup leather and flung it across the saddle.

"'Tis a cunning contrivance," the girl said, with approval. "Doubtless I am not the first woman to sit in this same saddle. Will my lord help me?"

She put her foot in my hands, and leapt lightly into the saddle, grasping the reins as

### THE POINT OF HONOUR

one who was no stranger to them. Then I mounted the box and whipped up the sluggish beasts, who doubtless had grown despairing of stable and fodder. The serving lass rode gallantly by my side, but her face was turned resolutely from me so that I could not see it.

"She is a stubborn wench," I said to myself, half in anger, half in amusement, "and I dare swear that her face is as pretty as her voice, albeit she is at so much pains to hide it."

So in a little while we came to the Eagle, and I called out as loudly as I could for an ostler, while the girl slid from my saddle to the ground and stood at the horse's head. My voice brought mine host himself to the door. He stood for a moment in mute amazement, looking from me to the lass and from the lass again to me as though he knew not what to make of it. Then he rubbed his eyes vigorously and found his tongue.

"Lord sakes, Master Tony!" he exclaimed. "What will you be doing with the coach?"

"Taking the place of a rascal that ran from a pistol shot," I answered, leaping from the box and throwing open the door. "Here is a lady seeking your hospitality, Barney. Set the best supper you have upon the table, and see that the claret be well buttered, for the lady is weary and sick to death of fright. She and her maid here shall be my guests for the night."

A smile twisted the mouth of the rogue as he bowed before the lady.

"Mr. Bagenal's guests shall have the best room and the best wine and food in the inn," he said. "Will the lady be pleased to enter?"

So she followed mine host and I turned to the girl, and, taking the reins from her hand, said, "You are a brave rider, and a man might envy you your courage."

She made me a little courtesy. "There is need of some courage when one must have enough for two," she returned. "Madame is not over strong, and a rough voice affrights her. When she is rested she will thank you fittingly for your help."

Then, before I could reply, she had followed her mistress into the inn.

As soon as I had seen to the stabling of my

horse, I, too, entered, and found mine host busily preparing supper in the guest chamber.

"Will the lady's maid-servant sup in the same chamber?" he inquired.

"By my faith, that she shall," I exclaimed; "for I have never known a wench of her condition with so pretty a wit and yet so modest withal."

"If her wit be as pretty as her face, Master Tony," said the old rogue with a smile, "I had liefer entertain the maid than the mistress."

"Begone, Barney," I cried, pretending anger, "and look to the supper. Beauty and wit are ill words in the mouth of an old greybeard like you."

"It is the brightest things that dim eyes see best, Master Tony," he returned; "and what is brighter than youth and beauty?"

"I have no leisure to talk of such matters," I cried, "seeing that my stomach clamours for food. Begone, and bid the rascals make haste."

At length a most excellent supper was set upon the table—nor could it have been better had it been set for Sir Miles himself, and he swearing to put a hole in every rascal in the inn if it was not to his liking.

So I sent Barney to beg Madame Murchison for the honour of her company to supper. I waited impatiently, not so much from hunger, though my stomach craved food sorely, but because the old innkeeper's eyes had been sharper than mine. It was in my mind to devise some punishment for the wench who had so flouted me, but, before I could come to any resolve upon the matter, the door opened and she stood upon the threshold.

I could scarce repress a cry of astonishment at seeing her face for the first time, for her features were of great beauty and marvellously delicate. I thought I saw a gleam of amusement in her dark eyes, albeit her manner was of great humility, nor could I forbear to think how strange it was that a lady so lacking in grace should be attended by so much loveliness.

"My mistress bids me thank you, sir, for your courtesy," she said, calmly, "but would fain be pardoned if she do not sup with you, since she is indisposed and has not yet recovered from her alarms." "Your mistress shall have pardon, but only upon one condition," I returned.

"And that, sir?"

"That her maid take her place," I exclaimed; "for by my soul I have no mind to sup alone."

"You do a poor maid too much honour, sir, but since we are so greatly your debtors, I will beg this favour of her, albeit it is a strange request."

Then she went out, but in a little while returned.

"My mistress is desirous of obliging you, sir, since you wish my poor company," she said, and I could have sworn that her colour was grown deeper; "but she has pledged me to be discreet and to keep a guard upon my tongue, lest I talk too freely, as women are like to do. Yet 'tis a strange thing for a poor girl to sup with a gentleman."

"To-night you are my guest," I said, taking her hand and leading her to the table, "and so there is no difference between us. Think of me as a brother, or as a ——" lover was on my lips, but I checked it.



- "As a what, sir?" she asked, with drooped eyelids.
- "As a cousin," I returned; "for I think I have such an one somewhere in the world, though I dare swear she has not half your beauty."
- "It is not easy, since we met but three hours ago; but, if it please you, I shall be as a cousin until you have supped."
- "Then you shall call me Tony, and I will call you ——"
- "My name is Cherry," she answered, laughing.
- "'Tis a pretty name, sweet as summer," I answered, "and no prettier than its owner."
- "Since I am your cousin, I must needs listen to your pretty speeches," she returned; "but I pray you do not turn a poor girl's head with flattery, lest she believe it and forget that she is not your cousin, and be sorry for it after."
- "I would that she might," I cried, "for then I might dare to tell her that I loved her."
  - "Till you have supped?"
- "And for ever after," I cried, for my blood was grown very hot as I watched her.

- "And we should be no longer cousins," she broke out.
- "What matters that?" I cried. "Since lover is a sweeter name than cousin, let us be lovers!"
  - "Till you have supped?"

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"And for ever after," I said, drawing her towards me.

But she broke from me.

- "The play is ended with your supper," she said, "and my mistress awaits me."
- "What matters it, when I love you?" I urged.
- "I am a poor girl, and have no proof of it," she replied. "How can I tell?"
- "I will marry you," I burst out, for wine and love made me reckless, "and here is a proof of it," and I would have kissed her lips. But she drew back. "'Tis a pledge easily given," she retorted, "and lightly broken; so I would have another."
- "By mine honour—the honour of a Bagenal—I will marry you, Cherry. Does that satisfy you?"
  - "'Tis sufficient!" she cried; "a Bagenal

was ever true to his honour." Then she resisted no longer, and I caught her in my arms and kissed her.

I was eager to settle the business and marry her outright, before my head cooled and I could repent of my pledge, but she would not consent.

- "There is not far from here a church; I think they call it St. Bride's," she said.
- "It is very true," I returned, wondering at her meaning.
- "They say that a man cannot remain constant for a year and a day to a woman," she went on.
  - "'Tis a foolish proverb," I broke in.
- "It may be, but I will make a trial of it. On this day, for it is now near daybreak, of next year, at the hour of noon, I shall await you in the Church of St. Bride, and there I will marry you, if Tony Bagenal is still minded to wed a poor maid-servant whom he has found and befriended on the roadside."
- "That he shall do, by mine honour!" I cried. Then I began to pray her that we might not wait till the year was out, seeing

that we were both young and that youth is wont to be impatient. But she would not listen to me, and at length broke from me and fled to escape my importunity, which, in truth, grew greater the more she resisted me.

So I found myself alone, and my head not very clear to consider what I had done, and how that I, Tony Bagenal, heir to Sir Miles, the proudest man in Christendom, was pledged to wed a mere waiting-maid, for all her beauty.

Yet for that I cared little, since her wit had enslaved me near as much as her beauty, and my blood was hot with the desire to possess her.

So thinking, I fell asleep, and did not wake till the sun was already high. For a moment I could have sworn that the events of the night were only a dream, when my eye caught sight of a bunch of cherry blossoms lying upon the table by my side. I caught it up. The dew of the morning was still fresh upon it, so that I knew that it had been set there but lately. I thrust it into my breast, for I could no longer doubt that it was Cherry, the maid-servant whom I was

pledged to marry in a year and a day, had placed it by me.

So straightway I summoned my host and inquired of him how his other guests had fared, since I desired the honour of waiting upon Madame Murchison.

"That will be no easy matter, Master Tony," he answered, "for the lady was so eager to continue her journey that she ordered her coach three hours ago, being resolved, she declared, never again to travel by night lest some trouble should befall her. And, what is worse, she has taken her maid with her, and every rascal in the place dying for a smile from her. 'Tis the prettiest lass in the country. Lord sakes! what eyes she has, and what lips."

"Aye, 'tis pretty enough," I returned, scarce able to conceal my vexation, and cursing myself for having fallen asleep like an infant. Then, seeing that he could tell me nothing as to whither they had gone, I called for my horse, and, throwing the innkeeper some gold pieces, I flung myself into the saddle and rode homeward to Kilfenora.

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It was in my mind to tell my uncle something of my adventure and yet be silent on that part which touched me most nearly, until such a time as he should be free from the gout which now troubled him sorely. So I told him first of Rody Macnamara, and how the physician had said that he would soon mend and forget that he had ever been hipped. At this Sir Miles seemed not over well pleased.

"If the boy forget it," he replied, "he will be the first that ever forgot that Spitfire blazed at him and remembered aught else."

"I would not have it otherwise," I said; "since in these days friends are few."

"Aye, 'tis very true," he returned. "The times are changed sadly, since to-day I have but one friend when twenty years ago I had twenty. You were in your cradle when I met Roger Burke in the same Friar's Field and Spitfire put a hole in his lungs so that the blood choked his voice and he could only tell me he loved me by the turn of his eye. He was a straight shot, and he loved the bottle and women too, which was folly. Yet

I loved him near as well as I love you. The times are sadly changed: the men are become women."

"And the women are become men," I broke out. Then I told him how I had come upon Madame Murchison's coach and had driven off the rascal that would have robbed her, and how her maid had struggled with the fellow.

"She is a good wench," said he; "but what of her mistress?"

"Of her I can tell you little, sir," I returned, "save that her face was like Parson Green's parchment that he loves so well, and her voice like the corncrake's."

"I am glad of it, Tony," he cried, "for by my soul I thought I saw that in your eye which told me she was fair. The Lord reward her for her ugliness, since I have other plans for you than a wife won by a sword-blade."

"For me, sir?" I echoed.

"Aye, for you, Tony," he went on. "See here, Tony, I have always drunk and fought with men, so I know little of women. Now I think I am too old to learn of them even had I the mind for it, which I have not. Yet would I have you mate a woman that was virtuous and would bring you honour and some fortune. The Bagenals have ever thought little of fortune, and less of the spending it. So I have found a wife for you, Tony, that a man might well be proud of."

- "A wife!" I exclaimed, for the suddenness of the thing confused me, remembering what had happened a few hours ago.
- "Aye, a wife, and one of your own kin, to boot."
  - "Who is she?" I asked, indifferently.
- "No parchment-faced dame, be sure," he broke out with a laugh, "but your own cousin, Cerise de Burgh, who, I learn, is but lately returned from France."
- "I have never seen her, so I cannot tell how she may look," I answered, thinking of Cherry.
  - "She was a pretty child," he went on.
- "So was many an ugly woman," I returned.

"There you are wrong, Tony," he cried; "for women are like colts. Who ever saw a three-year-old belie the promise of youth?"

"It matters little, sir, whether she be fair or plain," I said, coming to a resolve, "since I have already chosen the maid that shall be my wife."

His brows grew heavy, clouding his eyes, which shot fire at me.

- "By my soul you have!" he cried. "Who is the jade?"
- "She is as virtuous as she is beautiful," I returned hotly, "and as brave as—as Sir Miles Bagenal."
- "I thank you for the comparison, Sir Tony," he answered tartly, "albeit it is a strange test of a girl's courage. What is her name?"
  - "Cherry is her name."
  - "Of what family?"
- "I know not, seeing that she is poor, and in the service of one richer in wealth than in grace."
  - "A common hussy," he burst out, wrathfully.

- "Whom I am pledged to marry," I said.
- "I am slow of hearing," he retorted.
- "Whom I will marry at noon—on this day year."
- "I would that I were deaf that I might not hear you speak so, Tony, but the times are sadly changed," he said. Then he went to a cabinet, and, opening a drawer, took out two small leather bags. These he set upon the table between us.
- "There is your inheritance—a thousand guineas," he said. "On this day year your cousin Cerise shall be my heir if you do not repent."
  - "I shall never repent," I cried.
- "Then she shall be to me as a son, and the inheritor of all I have, save my title, if you wed any such base-born jade. Go, the world may teach you better than I have," and he pushed the bags towards me.
- "But not to be faithless to my pledge," I returned, "nor to dishonour the name that I bear. Farewell."

He seemed to struggle with himself a moment; then he held out his hand, and the

sight of his fingers, knotted as they were with the gout, touched my heart.

- "Farewell, uncle," I repeated, taking his hand.
- "You shall be my son till this day year and after," he returned, and his voice shook, "if you will give up the jade."
- "My honour is pledged as well as my heart," I made answer.

So he pointed to the bags of gold lying upon the table, and I took them and went out without another word.

In a few hours I had left Kilfenora and my uncle's anger behind me, and was making for the city, where I had hopes that a stout arm and a ready blade, not to speak of some skill with the fire-irons, would set me well upon the road to fortune. But, concerning this matter, I had no settled plan, seeing that but yesterday I had thought myself the heir of my uncle's property, as of his name and title, and now I was but a beggar, save for a thousand guineas. I laughed outright at the strange trick which fortune had played me, and at the folly of losing my inheritance for the sake of a servant-lass

whom a gentleman might well have hoped to win at much less cost. And yet I loved her the more, I dare swear, for my uncle's anger, and because he would have mated me with a wife of his own choosing whom I had never yet set eyes upon, albeit she was a kinswoman of my own.

Of how I fared in the city it boots not to tell, since I had good and evil fortune, yet more of evil—as was natural, seeing that I was country bred and used to put more trust in my sword than my wit. So it was that when the year was near run I was little better than a beggar.

"A beggar is fittest to marry a beggarmaid," I said to myself, somewhat bitterly, when my horse faced westward to the church of St. Bride. Then my pride came to my aid, for was I not keeping my pledge and saving my honour, albeit I saved little else?

As the distance grew less, my heart grew hotter with love, remembering Cherry and the curve of her lips, so that I became fearful lest she should be faithless to her pledge.

"Rather Cherry, base-born and penniless,

than Cerise, with all my uncle's wealth," I cried out, putting spurs to my horse.

The beast broke into a canter, and my heart rose high; albeit I was bound for my wedding, and had but fifty guineas in my purse. I had dressed myself with care, and my horse was worthy of a gentleman, even though he were somewhat out of sorts with fortune.

At length the tower of St. Bride's Church struck my eye, and made my heart beat quickly. I rode on faster, for it wanted but a little to noon, and I was loath to be accounted a loiterer, if not worse.

Now, when I entered the village of Bagenalstown, which I had not seen since I had left Kilfenora, a most strange scene greeted me, for all the houses were decked with flowers, and over the roadway were hung banners bearing the words "Welcome," "Honour before Gain," which was the Bagenal motto, and many such like.

"'Tis some noble that will wed in the self-same church," I thought, "and yet Cherry and I will have a share of his welcome."

But, as I went on, a great crowd or children,

daintily dressed, came to meet me, and threw flowers under my horse's feet as I passed along; so that I was greatly perplexed, and knowing not what else to do, I took my hat from my head and bowed low to them, while they cried out their welcome.

When I reached the gateway leading to the church, I was like one in a dream, for a servant, richly dressed, came forward, and, with great humility, aided me to dismount, while another took my horse's head. Then a third begged I would follow him to the church.

Now, if these things had amazed me, what I saw at the church door amazed me still more; for there a great company was assembled, and in the midst of them was Sir Miles, and leaning upon his arm a lady, richly dressed and closely veiled, so that I could not see her face. Then the treachery of the whole matter broke upon me, and I turned away, but Sir Miles seized my arm.

"Welcome, Tony, to Bagenalstown and to Kilfenora!" he cried, "since you have kept the honour of our house. See, there is your reward; your bride awaits you." But I shook his hand from me, roughly. "She is no bride for me," I said. "I look for a poor girl, and nameless as well as penniless, to share my misfortunes and help to make them lighter."

"Whether you wed her or not," answered Sir Miles, "it is only seemly that you should greet your kinswoman, Cerise de Burgh, for the honour of our family."

"As you will," I answered, sullenly. Then advancing towards where the lady stood, with the jewels flashing upon her head and veil I burst out:

"Madame, we have both been sorely wronged. I am here to wed Cherry, a poor maiden whom I love."

"And what is Cherry but Cerise, good sir?" she asked, lifting her veil and making me a courtesy. "'Tis not the first time that the mistress has changed places with the maid."

And then I knew, indeed, what trick had been played upon me; for Cerise was indeed Cherry whom I had wooed at the inn and was pledged to marry, and Madame Murchison but her attendant. I could find no word to answer

her, but could only kiss her hand, since before the company I might not kiss her cheek.

"Is the cherry less sweet if it have a foreign name?" she asked, smiling; "and do you repent of your pledge?"

At this I could refrain no longer, since it was, indeed, Cherry that spoke. So, forgetting all those about us, I caught her to my heart; and since that day she has never left it.

# CHAPTER II

#### MY LADY'S HONOUR

Showing how Roger Blake hipped Sir Miles Cogan on his first blood, and thereby saved his Lady's Honour

My father loved peace greatly, albeit he was Galway born and had been suckled on the Code of Honour as every gentleman was and had need to be. He was a poor man at the bottle, and found little pleasure in quarrelling with his friends or laying them in the Friar's Field. Thus it was that he had few friends, while my uncle Roger had many that loved him and would have died for him, as indeed not a few did, to prove that Roger Blake was the straightest shot in the kingdom.

My father was gentle, and loved poetry better than drinking, and that he was no mean poet himself I dare swear, since my Lord Bishop of Derry was used to put many of his verses into the sermons which he preached before the Viceroy's Court. Moreover, he loved women better than he loved men, for which the women scorned him, and the men made jests about him when the wine flowed, and Roger shouted with laughter at their wit.

It was Roger that taught me all the things that I knew of sword-play, and of point blankers, and how to fire straight at a hand gallop. When I was ten and could repeat the Gentleman's Creed, as the Code of Honour was called, he told me that I knew all that a gentleman had need to know, and forbade me to forget that it was he who had taught me.

"I'll never marry, boy," he said, "for women are kittle cattle for a man to manage unless he gives them all his time. So Roger, my lad, you shall be your uncle's heir, as well as your father's. My blessing is worth little, but Sparks and Lay-'em-out are worth much to a man of sense and discretion. They shall be yours when I am done with them."

I gazed at his favourite pistols with the niches graved on the stocks, telling of those whom they had hipped, winged or laid, and I was filled with pride and not a little awe. I was impatient to become a man that I might go out with my uncle in the mornings and blaze at a friend in the Friar's Field, and no longer at the wooden figure, which he had made for me.

I came into my inheritance sooner than I had thought to do, for one morning, while my father and I were still at breakfast, Roger Blake was carried into the house, with a ball in his head, and as lifeless as an empty bottle.

'Twas but a half-mounted gentleman after all, and one that had never fired straight before, who robbed the country of the gallantest rider and straightest shot in the kingdom, and had Roger Blake foreseen what would happen, 'twould have broken his heart, to think that he should be put to sleep by a man who was not his equal, instead of by one who loved him, and that the honour of killing him had gone to a stranger.

For days my father was distraught, and I little better; albeit, I had some comfort, for I took my uncle's pistols and soon fell asleep, kissing them and sobbing over them. My father never ceased grieving for his brother,

albeit his death had made him head of the house, and Lord of the Castle and lands of Inishogue. So Sir Denis took the place of Sir Roger, and the crowds of gallant gentlemen came no longer to drink buttered claret at night and plan meetings for the morrow.

And I must needs learn Latin and such things albeit my uncle Roger had declared that at ten years of age I had learned all that a gentleman had need to know. So I must spend the morning hours in the book-room, when I was fain to be out on the hills with the gun, or on horseback following the deer.

But the big strong man was dead, and Sir Denis had other plans for his son, than had Sir Roger for his heir. Yet, in secret I loved my uncle best, and resolved that I would forget none of his teaching for all my peaceful life.

Now Sir Roger had ever been a man great at spending money, and caring little whence it came. Sir Denis, too, thought more of a sonnet, especially if it was after the Italian fashion, than he did of a hundred guineas.

So it was not unnatural that when I was come to a man's estate, I should bethink me of

seeking fortune elsewhere than at home. And for this latter I might have been better fitted, if Sir Roger had lived, for then I had not spent so much of my time in reading the Latin and Italian poets, and striving in secret to rival them, when I might have been drinking with my friends or blazing at them, as the custom was. But my father had set his face against fighting, since the death of Sir Roger, and so it came about that when I had reached my twenty-third year, I had never blazed at anything save the wooden figure that my uncle had made for me, and had never faced a pistol aimed by friend or enemy.

My father was fain to keep me at home in peace, but the need was so great that I should seek fortune, and I was no longer content with tales of love and battle, but impatient to be accounted a man by those who had heard of Sir Roger.

So I set out for the Capital, bearing a letter commending me to the Lady Isabel Carmody, who was a kinswoman, and accounted of great fashion and influence in the Capital, and chiefly with the Viceroy.

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As soon as the tailor had made me better pleased with myself, I presented myself to my cousin. She was still handsome, albeit no longer young, and to me would have seemed the most beautiful woman that ever I had seen, had it not been for the presence of another to whom she presented me.

The Lady Isabel received me graciously enough, but with much dignity, as though she would not have me forget how greatly honoured I was to be so greeted.

- "You are very welcome, sir," she said, giving me her hand, which I kissed humbly, "and you may command my services, when they are needful."
- "You are very gracious, Madam," I murmured, "and I trust that soon I shall have the chance to show my gratitude." At this she seemed pleased.
- "The son of Sir Roger Blake is well worth serving," she answered, "if he resembles his father in aught. God's sakes, Peggy, that was a man!"
  - "You are mistaken, Madam," I said, "for

I am not Sir Roger's son, but only his nephew."

At this she drew back, and the smile left her face.

"Indeed, sir, I am," she retorted, "for now that I think of it, you are more like a poet than a fighter. Fighters should ever be ruddy of face and full of blood; but your eyes are dark as night, and your face pale as the moon. Is it not so, Peggy?" And she turned to her companion.

"True, Lady Isabel," the lady answered so sweetly that my resentment was quickly cooled. "Yet many poets have been great fighters too. How can a man sing worthily of battles who dares not do the deeds he sings?"

I turned from my cousin to the lady, and, bowing low before her,

"I thank you, Madam," I said, "both for the goodness of your heart, as well as for your wisdom, for, albeit I am no poet, I know that your words are true."

My cousin looked perplexed a moment, then burst out laughing.

"Since Lady Peggy Devereux, so long the

despair of every gallant gentleman, has taken my kinsman's side," she exclaimed, "'twould be strange and not easy to be forgiven were I against him. Forgive me, Roger, I did but jest. No doubt that your sword is as ready as it should be, since you are a Blake, and Lady Peggy believes in you." And she smiled mockingly at the girl, who seemed to be somewhat put out of countenance by my cousin's raillery. But, for answer, I made Lady Peggy a low bow.

"'Twere enough to make a coward brave, Madam," I said, "to know that you believed him to be so. When Lady Peggy would make trial of Roger Blake's courage or gratitude, she shall have it," and I tapped the hilt of my sword.

"I thank you, sir," the younger lady answered very sweetly, "since a lady might well trust the honour and courage of a Blake, and be proud to lean upon them."

"Very pretty indeed, by my faith," cried Lady Isabel; "would there were more to witness so sweet a play. Has Diana loosed her zone at last for a wild hunter from the west, because he has the eyes and the cheek of a poet? How the city will talk, when it hears how the Lady Peggy's heart has been won by a boy who has never fleshed his sword, and whose voice has scarce yet got the ring of a man in it. Lord! Peggy, you will be the death of my kinsman." And she burst into loud laughter.

But Lady Peggy did not join in her laughter. Her cheeks flamed, and her eyes flashed. She drew herself up very haughtily.

"Lady Isabel," she returned calmly, though her bosom heaved, "I see no cause for such rude mirth, since I have only declared my belief in the honour and courage of a gentleman, who is your own kinsman. My wits are dull to-day, or else I am lacking in humour, since I find such a matter unsuitable for jesting."

Then she made us a low courtesy, and swept from the room. When she was gone I turned to my cousin.

"Madam," I said, coldly, "I had not thought that in the house of a kinswoman my honour would stand in need of a stranger's defence. I pray you pardon me that I have claimed more than kinship warrants. I had thought to find a friend."

"Tush, boy; where are your wits?" she cried, impatiently. "You have found a friend, and, if I mistake not, a lover, if so be you have the heart to win her."

"My wits are indeed dull," I returned, "for I see little wit in the jest."

"'Tis no jest," she made answer, "for I think you have touched the lady's heart."

"The lady's heart?" I echoed.

"Aye, in truth; the heart of Lady Peggy Devereux, that every buck in the city would risk his life for, albeit she only mocks them for their pains. Yet, 'twill be no easy thing to win and hold, seeing that she loves daring and gallantry, however she talk of poetry and such things."

"You are pleased to jest again, Lady Isabel," I said, albeit my heart beat fast, thinking of so much beauty, and that maybe 'twas not all a jest.

"'Tis no jest," she answered, impatiently, "if you have a drop of Sir Roger's blood in you, and think the lady fair."

- "I have never seen one half so fair," I burst out, so eagerly that I think my cousin would have been as well pleased with less vehemence.
- "You have lived in a cloister, Roger," she returned coldly. "Yet many men think her fair, and she has a great fortune."
  - "For that I care nothing," I cried.
- "Since you are Sir Roger's heir and he has left you-"
  - "His blessing," I interrupted.

She burst out laughing.

- "I could have sworn it," she said.
- "And his pistols," I went on.
- "Ah, that is better, if you can use them," she replied, more seriously; "can you shoot straight?"
- "Were you a man I could answer you," I returned, for, since she was a woman, I dared not tell her that I had never yet blazed at a man, albeit I could hit the red patch on Sir Roger's wooden figure at twenty paces.
- "Being a woman I am answered," she said; "forgive me, Roger, if I have wronged you, since I loved Roger Blake," and she gave me her hand. I was amazed seeing the tears in

her eyes, for I had thought her a cold woman of the world, because I knew nothing of women. So I took her hand and kissed it.

"If you need a service, cousin Isabel," I returned, "pray remember that I am Roger Blake's kin as well as his namesake, to sustain the honour of the family both with sword and pistol, as my uncle taught me."

"If Roger Blake taught you, and you are true to your pledge, then I should be a proud woman," she said; "and, indeed, so I am, since it was only the tongue of a woman that did you wrong when her heart gave it the lie."

Then, when I would have kissed her hand, she presented her cheek to me. But I kissed her boldly upon the lips, at which she feigned anger, blushing very becomingly.

"A man might well be proud to serve so fair a kinswoman, and be so rewarded," I said, and would have saluted her again, but she drew back laughing.

"Truly you are Sir Roger's heir," she cried, "for he loved woman only with his lips. Go, lest I grieve to think that there are twenty years between my youth and me."

So I went down the stair, feeling as though

it were years since I had entered. As I passed through the hall the Lady Peggy met me. She made me a courtesy as her eyes greeted mine, and I could have sworn that her colour was grown deeper. Taking a sudden resolve, I turned and stood before her.

- "Madam," I said, bowing low, "we may not meet again, but I would fain thank you for your kind words to a stranger."
  - "No, not a stranger," her lips murmured.
- "I thank you again," I went on, "and would pray you to remember that whenever Lady Peggy Devereux would make trial of the gratitude of a poor gentleman she may command the sword and life of Roger Blake."
- "I shall remember," she returned, smiling very sweetly; "such a pledge, and backed by such a name, is not lightly to be forgotten." And again she made me a courtesy and passed on.

Then I went out, and for some minutes could see nothing save her face, so dazzled was I by its beauty.

Now, the times were troublous, and a woman was wont to hold a ready sword or a

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I was mightily proud that a lady of so much wit and beauty should have chosen to lay her quarrels upon me, who was a stranger, with my spurs yet to win, and that too albeit, if gossip spoke truly, there was no lack of gentlemen in the city ready to shed their own and another's blood to win a smile from her. Yet I was not vain enough to lay this to the credit of my own deserving rather than to my uncle's name, albeit Sir Roger had last drawn a hair-trigger a dozen years before.

Now, this was what my father had feared most greatly, lest at the Court men should forget that I was the son of Sir Denis in remembering that I was the nephew of Sir Roger. Thus it was that, before I set out for the capital, I must needs pledge myself to be a man of peace for thirty days, nor draw a sword nor a pistol, save in the defence of my honour or my life.

"The Viceroy has brawlers in plenty about his court," said Sir Denis, "and will prize a man of peace and discretion."

So I gave him the promise, albeit I knew

that 'twould have broken Sir Roger's heart to think that one of his name should keep his barkers Sparks and Lay-'em-out so long idle, and that I should so soon forget what he had taught me. Yet at the time it seemed no very grave matter, nor could I have guessed that so light a thing should go near to prove my undoing.

Now, when I came to the Capital I was welcomed with great kindness by the bucks, who had loved Sir Roger, and by the young bloods who loved his memory, and must needs drink to him and to his barkers at the Black Horse Tayern, and all the while no man spoke of Sir Denis, but only of Sir Roger and of Sparks and Lay-'em-out, and of those that he had hipped, winged, or laid. albeit their love was very agreeable to me, I must keep a cool head, seeing that I was pledged to be a man of peace for thirty days. So I would not pass the third bottle lest my head should grow hot and I should forget my This was little to their liking, since promise. I was named after my kinsman, and Sir Roger had never cried "enough" till within an hour of sunrise, when he had business to settle and feared lest the dawn should dazzle his eyes and make his aim unsteady, which had happened once when he was a lad, so that he failed to hip his man, but only broke his leg.

Now, when they could not break my resolve they took it ill, grieving over me as if I were sick of a fever and must die in my bed, and no longer bade me drink with them nor spoke of Sir Roger. So I determined that I would go no more to the Black Horse until I might drink buttered claret with them at night and meet them with point-blankers in the morning, for in truth I was grieved to make them sad, since already I was grown to love them, and most of all Amby Burke, who was but a month older than I and had met his man eighteen times, five times with the sword at a hand gallop, as the old custom was, and thirteen times with the hair-trigger.

Now it wanted but two days to complete the thirty and set me free to follow Sir Roger's teaching, when I received a message from the Lady Isabel Carmody bidding me to her rout that same night. I had never seen anything

half so brilliant, for my cousin was a lady of fashion as well as of beauty, and her wit made men forget the years that she had counted. So it was that all the most gallant gentlemen of the city came to kiss her hand, and to whisper scandal of the fair women that denied them. And of fair women there was no lack; albeit my eyes were blind to their beauty, while I sought for Lady Peggy Devereux.

I found it no easy matter to greet my cousin, so great was the throng about her; but at length I grew impatient, and pushed my way through the crowd. When her eyes fell upon me, she smiled very pleasantly.

- "You are late, cousin Roger," she cried, giving me her hand.
  - "Since you have many lovers," I returned.
- "The true lover should ever be first, lest he come too late," she retorted, laughing.

So I kissed her hand, and would have withdrawn to make way for others, but she held me back, and putting her lips near to my ear, whispered—"Go seek the Lady Peggy and greet her as publicly as you can, for the sake of your honour." Then she turned from me, and

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I drew back like one in a dream, so amazed was I at her words. Yet, seeing that I had but little hope to discover her meaning, I resolved to obey her, and that the more readily since my heart backed her words. If my honour were in peril, I well knew how to defend it.

I made what haste I could through the crowd, until I came to a chamber where the minuet was forward. There, standing by a pillar, I saw Lady Peggy. The light of the candles flashed on the jewels in her hair; but her eyes were brighter than they, and her neck whiter than the pearls that enriched it. About her was a group of gentlemen, who seemed eager to win her smile; as, indeed, well they might: since her laughter was sweeter than the song of the thrush. I watched her a moment, marvelling at her beauty. Then of a sudden her eyes met mine: and I could have sworn that I saw the blood flame in her cheeks. I hesitated no longer, but strode forward, caring naught for the angry looks that were cast upon me.

"Roger Blake begs that the fairest lady in the kingdom will tread a measure with him," I said, and bowed low before her.

- "I know not who she may be," she answered, smiling.
- "I know none half so fair as the Lady Peggy Devereux," I cried.
- "A pretty speech, by my faith, is it not so, gentlemen?" she returned, "and, indeed, I know not how to answer it, since I am so greatly honoured."
  - "Yet I would have an answer," I said.
- "Then, sir, you shall," she broke out. "Peggy Devereux is proud to step it with the bravest gentleman in the kingdom. Here's my hand on it." And I thought she looked defiantly at those about her. But I knelt and kissed her hand, and then placed it upon my arm. And so, when she had made them a courtesy, I led her away, and my heart leaped at the anger in their faces.
- "By my faith, 'twas a bold stroke," she said after a moment, "to make so many enemies so quickly. Yet I love you all the better for it, since none but a Blake would dare it."
- "So you love me, I care not if every man in the world were an enemy," I cried.
  - "Hush, I pray you," she murmured, "till we

may speak freely, for I have somewhat to say to you in private."

So I led her to an alcove, where we might speak without fear of listeners.

She spoke in so low a voice that the beating of my heart was louder.

- "'Tis but a few days since that you pledged yourself to defend my honour. Now I have need of your service."
  - "Your honour is safe," I returned.
- "Yet I fear there is danger," she went on watching me.
- "I have not been taught the meaning of the word," I said proudly. "Tell me what I must do, and it shall be done. Believe me that I shall bring no dishonour upon the name I bear."
- "I could have sworn it," she muttered, as though she answered her own thoughts. "I am proud to be so served."
  - "And the service?" I asked.

She came close to me.

"'Tis now past daybreak," she said. "Go hence, without delay, and send a message to Sir Miles Cogan, bidding him meet you in the Nine Acres one hour after dawn to-morrow."

I started, for she had named the straightest shot in the kingdom, and one not like to miss at sixteen paces.

- "You can play with the barkers?" she asked, a little anxiously, as I thought.
- "If Sir Roger has taught me well I am no dullard," I returned. "I will hip the rascal."
- "I thank you, sir," she said very sweetly; "and your reward—what shall it be?"
- "It is so great that I dare not ask for it!" I answered, for my blood was grown hot.
- "Then, sir," she made answer, "if you shall find courage to ask for it, Peggy Devereux will not complain of the terms;" and making me a courtesy, she turned and left me before I could find a word.

So I forsook Lady Isabel's ball-room, and made haste to return to my lodging. Neither did I lose any time in keeping my promise to Lady Peggy, but at once despatched a message to Sir Miles Cogan, begging that he would honour me with his presence in the Nine Acres an hour after sunrise on the next day. In a little while the answer was brought me that Sir Miles Cogan would have great pleasure to put

a hole in Mr. Roger Blake's body, at whatever point was most agreeable to him. Then I wrote a letter to my father, telling him how that I had kept my pledge and been a man of peace for thirty days, but was now about to defend my honour as Sir Roger had taught me.

I had scarce finished the letter, when a sword hilt rattled noisily upon the door and Amby Burke entered. He made me a curt bow, then flinging his hat upon the table, he threw himself into a chair, whence he gazed at me, for some moments, with a mournfulness that would have grieved me had I been more at leisure. But I saw only that his cheek was flushed and his eyes dull, as though he had drunk deep.

"I am much honoured by your visit," I said, when I had waited for him to speak, "yet I fear that fortune has played a scurvy trick upon you."

"Aye, that she has," he cried, "for I never felt sadder in my life; but my tongue is dry and I have no mind to talk."

"Then drink," I said, pushing the wine

towards him, "for I have some faith in the claret."

He raised the wine to his lips, then suddenly dashed it to the floor.

- "Pah!" he exclaimed, "it is foul, and such that no gentleman should give another. By my honour it is foul!"
- "By my honour," I cried, for the blood was in my head, "it is as good claret as ever came out of France, and he lies that dare deny it."

He took his hat from the table and made me a bow.

- "To-morrow," he said, "I shall be at your service."
- "And I at yours the day after," I returned.
  - "How so, sir?" he asked in some surprise.
- "Since I have invited Sir Miles Cogan to meet me to-morrow."
- "With point-blankers?" he asked, and his eyes flashed.
  - "With point-blankers," I replied.

He cast his hat upon the floor, and flung his arms about my neck.

"God forgive me, Roger," he cried, "for I

have spilt the best drop of claret that ever came out of France."

"So you have," I retorted, for I knew what was in his mind; "yet there is more if you would drink to a merry meeting and load my pistols in the morning."

"Aye, that I will, and carry you home and be your chief mourner, if need be," he cried out, "and you will forgive me for doubting a Blake."

Then I must needs drink buttered claret at the Black Horse and learn how greatly they loved me, who had lately looked coldly upon me, because I was to meet Sir Miles in the morning.

So within an hour after sunrise, Burke and I were upon the ground and Amby loaded my barkers, after that he had kissed them reverently in memory of Sir Roger.

Sir Miles was a big man and the mist had not yet risen. Moreover he wore a waistcoat of scarlet satin, which was very plain at twelve paces, and reminded me of the red patch on Sir Roger's wooden figure at Inishogue.

"Never look at the head or the heels," whis-

pered Amby in my ear when the ground was measured, and he had placed Lay 'em out in my hand, "the hip for ever!"

So we blazed as near as possible together, and to my great surprise I found myself still standing and no wound that I could discover, save what my tailor could mend, since the ball had torn a great portion of my sleeve away. But Sir Miles made me a bow and fell upon his face, for I had left a ball in his hip as I had sworn to do.

Then Amby and I went back to the Black Horse where many awaited us, eager to know the cause of the quarrel, but I would tell them nothing, since indeed I knew of no cause, and had never before set eyes upon Sir Miles.

Now, when the town had ceased to wonder how Roger Blake had hipped Sir Miles Cogan, and that too on his first blood, I grew impatient to learn how Lady Peggy regarded the matter, and if I might dare demand the reward which she had promised me.

So having learned that she was at my cousin's house I made haste to wait upon her. She was alone when I bowed before her.

"The Lady Isabel is from home, sir," she said, making me a courtesy.

"'Tis not my cousin, but the Lady Peggy Devereux that I have come to see," I answered.

"For which she is greatly honoured," she returned, and there was mockery in her voice.

I drew back stung by her coldness, and remembering that I had staked my life for her honour.

"I had not thought to find my presence unwelcome," I returned; "or it may be that you have forgotten a poor gentleman who has striven to serve you without hope of reward, and would serve you again."

- "Without reward?" she asked smiling.
- "Since his life is of so little worth."
- "What would you have?" she murmured, "for since you have served me, you shall have what you ask, for my honour is pledged."
  - "But your heart," I broke out.
- "'Tis pledged already," she murmured, looking down at her feet, "since Roger Blake has saved my honour."
  - "Your honour!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, my honour and your own," she answered, raising her eyes to my face, "since there were those that doubted it. So I played this trick upon you to prove me right. And for this I have been sorely punished, since I had no rest till they told me you were safe." And her head drooped until it rested upon my heart.

Then I knew indeed how the Lady Peggy Devereux had saved my honour, and how near I had gone to losing it.

# CHAPTER III

## THE LADY OF THE PISTOLS

In which is told how the Lady Barbara Crosbie laid Sir Phelim Burke upon the roadside and what came of it.

SIR PHELIM BURKE was no lover of women, and held it a sin to desert his bottle for the spinet. Yet, for the honour of his race, and because he would have an heir to his name, of which he was proud, and to his point-blankers which he loved, he begged a friend to find a wife for him.

"Of women I know nothing," he said, "seeing that I have spent my life with men and horses; but let her be young and lusty as a filly, for I would not give my name to a colt that was unsound."

So Pierce Butler whispered in the ear of Miss Teresa Laffan that Sir Phelim was caught by her beauty, and would neither drink nor blaze any more until he had carried her off; whereupon the lady blushed, full of joy and fear, since Sir Phelim was the handsomest, as well as the most quarrelsome, man in the country, and because women loved him as greatly as he scorned them.

So it was that my mother came to Kilrea.

Now, for a year after, my father went about with a sad face as one that had quarrelled with his bottle, and met his friends but seldom, and no longer with point-blankers in the morning. But when I came into the world with strong limbs and a loud voice, he summoned all the gentlemen in the county to sup with him. When they were assembled, I was brought into the chamber, and Sir Phelim with great dignity broke a bottle of claret over my head, calling them to witness that I was his heir, and that I had been baptised as every gentleman ought. Then they all drank to me in buttered claret, pledging themselves to be my friends as long as I lived, and to shoot my enemies after I was dead.

After this, my father followed the fox again,

and drank with his friends or blazed at them as he had been used. And when my mother died—for loneliness, when she knew that he had never loved her, but only wanted an heir and no wife—he did not greatly grieve for her, but gave her spinet to the church as a thank-offering, because the Lady Burke had borne him a son.

So I grew up, and Sir Phelim was proud because I was like him in face, and stood a good inch taller in my riding boots; and still more because, at fifteen years of age, I could drink a man's share of claret at night and hip my man in the morning, as happened when I had quarrelled with Phil Martin, and put him to sleep in the Friar's Field after dawn.

When he fell, my father caught me in his arms and kissed me on the cheek, swearing that he could die easy, since the gout had crippled him, and he had a son to take care of his barkers. Then he bade his friends to supper, and when he had strengthened his resolve with claret, he gave me his case of pistols, bidding me, with tears, to keep them in

memory of him, and use them to my own and his honour, since he was too old to do them credit. Next day he broke his neck in the hunting field, striving to give the lie to his words, and prove himself as young as any of us, as indeed he was, since, albeit the gout had crippled his limbs, it had never yet made his heart heavy.

So I sware to follow Sir Phelim in everything that he had done, and that no woman should ever make my heart weak or my hand unsteady. And this gave me but little trouble, since I loved the companionship of men and had as great a scorn of women as had my father. because my mother had died when I was a child, and I knew little of her save that she would weep when Sir Phelim called for his pistols at daybreak, and fall upon his neck when he came home to drink to the memory of the friend that he had killed. And seeing that I was but little more than twenty-three years of age, I had no thought for an heir to my name nor to my pistols, Blazer and Flash, lest they should fall to my cousin Roger Devine, whom I hated, because he was lean and illfavoured, and loved a guinea better than the honour of a gentleman.

'Twas the day after I had blazed at young Amby Bodkin, near the Down of Clapook—having ridden all night to oblige him, since he was to be married at noon—that I supped with Rody Macnamara, and as gallant a company of bottle-men as ever I met.

I was mightily proud, because I had left a ball in the curtain of Amby's side, and got no more than a scratch myself, albeit he was as straight a shot as his father. So, when we had drunk deep, I must needs tell how the quarrel arose—because Amby swore that the stag that we killed near the Friar's Copse last Martinmas was red, and would not take my word that it was brown until I had hipped him.

At this, Sir Peter Devereux took a mighty draught of buttered claret, and cried out—

- "By my soul, the stag was red!"
- "I beg you to believe that it was brown," I said.
  - "I take no man's word for it," he returned.
- "I swear, by my honour, the stag was brown," I cried.

"And I wager my honour that it was red,' he burst out.

At this a great clamour arose, some swearing that the stag was red, and others that it was brown, so that in a little while I had business with near half the company. But for that I cared little, since the wine was in my head, and I knew that, for six months to come, Amby Bodkin would have but one leg to stand upon.

Then I caught sight of my cousin's face, and the smile that was upon it.

- "You villain!" I cried. "You were thinking of Kilrea."
- "I confess that 'twas in my mind," he said.
  - "'Twill go no further," I broke out.
  - "I would not quarrel with you," he returned.
- "There are good reasons," I answered, tapping my sword hilt.
  - "Since you are a dead man," he went on.

At this, Sir Peter's face grew very sad, for he loved me greatly, albeit he prided himself on his skill with the barkers, and had no wish to see my cousin master of Kilrea in my stead, since Roger knew as little of claret as he did of a horse.

- "Phelim, dear," he whispered; "I'll call him out when you're dead."
- "I'll do it myself, Peter, when I've put you to sleep," I made answer, and pressed his hand. Then I turned to the company,
- "Gentlemen," I said, "in three days I will meet you."
- "Three days!" they echoed, remembering that I was Sir Phelim's son.
- "Aye, three days," I went on; "since I think I'll be married to-morrow."
- "Married!" exclaimed my cousin, with a pale face. "Who is the lady?"
- "I know not," I answered. "But I pledge myself, on my honour, to marry the first woman I meet, so she be well born, young, and a maid, since I would have an heir to my name and keep a villain out of my house."
- "I'll wager a thousand guineas," cried Roger, "that you'll die unwed."

But I did not answer him, and, turning to the company, who seemed doubtful if I jested or spoke from my heart, I bade them toast the Lady Burke whom I should wed within three days. So they drank to her in buttered claret, all save my kinsman; and when I had kissed Sir Peter on the cheek, I left them, and, leaping into my saddle, rode homeward to Kilrea.

The hot blood so troubled my brain that it was no easy matter to think clearly of the things that lay before me. Moreover, I had drunk deeper than was my wont, because I had hipped Amby Bodkin, and now I was sworn within three days to find me a wife and to kill my best friend, for so I think Sir Peter was until he fell at the Shepherd's Crossing.

Now, I have said I had no love for women since I was too young to be their slave, and had no mind to be their flatterer, yet I saw no other help than a woman's to save the honour of my house.

So thinking, I rode slowly and with slack rein down the hill. The air was cool and sweet, and there were streaks of dawn in the sky. 'Twas in my mind how good a morning 'twould be for a meeting, and it made me sad to be idle when I had so much business before me.

I had near reached the end of the hill, when I heard the sound of wheels following me. So I turned about and saw a great yellow coach coming towards me. The rogue that held the ribbons swayed to and fro as though the wine had mistaken his head for his stomach.

"'Tis the sun brings thirst and sorrow," he said, when he was come beside me.

"That is very true," I answered, "when the head is no match for the liquor. Whose wine have you so misused?"

"Whose but my Lord Castleton's. 'Twas the bravest rout that ever I saw, and who could deny my lord's bounty and my mistress's beauty?"

"Your mistress!" I exclaimed.

"Hush," he whispered, waving his hand unsteadily towards the curtained windows, "for I think the lady sleeps."

"Let her sleep then," I returned, "unless she be young."

A laugh gurgled in the rascal's throat.

"Young, lord save you!" he cried. "Why,

'tis not twenty years since she left her cradle; and as for her face, 'twould make a young man silly or an old man young to look at it."

"For her face I care little," I said, remembering my wager, "but only if she be a maid and of good birth."

A smile puckered the rogue's face.

"I dare swear that she is a maid," he answered, "yet not for long I'm thinking, since, if my old eyes are not yet blind, she will wed the Lord Castleton; and as for her birth, why he should be a proud man to ask better blood than the Lady Barbara Crosbie can give him."

"I would fain speak with your mistress," I said; for her name pleased me right well, and I was in humour with my fortune.

"Nay, sir," he replied, with some show of alarm, "for were I to wake her ladyship I should soon be as dead as an empty bottle." Then he began plying his whip as if to be free of me. But I drew a pistol from the holster and pointed it at his head.

"If you love lead better than gold," I said, "you shall have it."

At this he pulled up his horses.

"Since I am a man," he replied, "I must humour you, and a guinea in the purse is worth a pound of lead in the body, especially if one is a flesh-carrier," and he looked sorrowfully at his paunch.

"No doubt you will die in your bed," I said, smiling at his discretion.

"God send that I may, and be forgiven for my sins," he returned piously. "But what would you say to my mistress?"

"That I am pledged to marry her."

"Lord sakes! and who may you be?" he cried out.

But before I could answer him a fire-iron exploded, and a bullet whizzed past my ear.

The door of the coach was open, and by it stood the lady, holding the smoking pistol in her hand.

I sprang from the saddle and bowed low to her.

"I ask your pardon, Madam," I said; "for had not your rascal entertained me so excellently I should have presented myself sooner."

"And had I presented my barker as I am

used the world would have been rid of a rogue," she retorted, and threw the pistol to the ground at her feet.

Now, it is no pleasant thing to take the word "rogue" from the lips of man or woman; and yet her spirit pleased me so well, being little accustomed to it in women, that I looked at her some moments before I answered her. She was fairer and, I think, prouder than any woman that I had ever seen, and the jewels in her hair were not brighter than her eyes, nor was the silk that clothed her, from her bosom to her feet, whiter than the neck above it. Her cheek was still flushed with anger, which she seemed at some pains to control, and the sight of it made my blood hotter than ever had the wine cup.

I bent and took the pistol from the ground.

- "Tis a pretty plaything for a child," I said, looking at it, and, indeed, it was cunningly wrought and well balanced.
- "A child might have handled it better," she returned; "and yet, had not the light dazzled my eyes, I think 'twould have served my purpose."

- "But not mine," I made answer, "seeing that I have business with certain gentlemen but three days hence."
- "'Tis a long time for the making of one will," she cried out scornfully.
- "My will is made already," I returned, "but I would not desert my bride sooner."
- "Your bride!" she broke out. "Who may the lady be, that I may wish her joy?"
- "The Lady Barbara Crosbie," I answered, looking her in the eyes.

She gazed at me in amazement for some moments. Then she burst into laughter.

- "I am indeed fortunate," she cried, "for I had not thought to meet a jester."
  - "Who will be your husband," I added.

She made me a courtesy, mockingly.

- "I would fain know the name of him who does me so much honour," she cried.
  - "Sir Phelim Burke," I answered.

She drew back in surprise.

- "Of Kilrea?" she asked.
- "Of Kilrea."
- "The same that hipped Amby Bodkin at the Down of Clapook?"

## THE LADY OF THE PISTOLS

"And carried him to church for fear he should be late for his wedding," I went on.

She burst out laughing, though I could have sworn her eyes were more tender. Then she turned as if to enter the coach.

"I thank you, sir, for the honour you have done me, even in jest," she said, making me a courtesy.

But I caught her hand.

- "Madam," I said, "you do me wrong, for I do not jest. Sir Phelim Burke begs the hand of the Lady Barbara Crosbie."
- "When would Sir Phelim marry?" she asked.
- "Without delay, since I have business three days hence," I returned.
- "But if I be pledged to another?" she said, smiling.
  - "I set my life against his," I made answer.
- "Then finish your business, and I will think on the matter; but now I would find my rascally servant, for the horses grow impatient."
- "That may not be, Madam," I returned, "since I would have an heir to my name and my estates."

At this she drew back and the blood filled her cheeks. Then she leaned forward and cried out at me:

"'Tis an heir and no wife that you seek. If you be a man of honour you shall pay for the insult, and a woman shall teach you to play the man."

With that she struck me in the face with her gloved hand, so that my cheeks tingled. So amazed was I that I could not utter a word. Then she turned to the coach, and, drawing from it such another pistol as she had used already, she spoke with great calmness.

- "Sir," she said, "you have insulted me, and for the insult I demand that satisfaction which is due from every man of spirit. Shall it be twelve or sixteen paces?"
- "Whatever you will," I returned, since the thing was so strange that I had lost the power of thought.
- "I beg you to measure the ground, sir," she said.

So, scarce knowing what I did, I measured sixteen paces. Then I went to my horse and took a pair of pistols from the holster, begging

her to use one of them so that the fight might be more equal. Thus we took the ground, I facing the sun. But she would not have it so, and I must needs measure the ground again, that neither should have any advantage.

"When the cuckoo calls again, that will be the signal," she said, when we faced each other, and her voice was cold.

"As you will, Madam," I said, bowing.

So we stood waiting, and the horses browsed upon the grass by the wayside.

At last came the slow sound of the cuckoo.

The Lady Barbara's pistol flashed in my face; I turned aside and discharged my fireiron in the air. Then a sharp pain struck me in the breast and, the blood choking me, I fell on my face to the ground.

After this I remembered nothing, and 'twas long before I knew what had befallen me, since I lay near enough to death to make a waiting kinsman happy. And, in truth, I never before had such a blood-letting, not even when the apothecary had breathed a vein in my neck to stay the fever that followed my cousin Roger's

supper, because I trusted my kinsman's wine as I would that of a man of honour.

Yet for many days I was so weak that I could think of nothing save how weak I was, and scarce remembered that I was Sir Phelim's son and had business to settle with my friends. Nor did I know till afterwards how near I came to breaking Sir Peter's heart, since I had sworn to blaze at him first to show how much I loved him.

But when I grew stronger, and the pain in my breast was near gone, the little blood that was left me was hot to think of my honour and how my friends had waited in vain for me in the Friar's Field, because a woman had laid me at sixteen paces and would have put me to sleep had not Rody Macnamara's claret kept the life in me. Yet I felt no anger against the Lady Barbara, but only a great wonder at her spirit and because she played so prettily with the barkers, and was as straight a shot as Amby Bodkin himself.

So, to make my couch easier, I would think of her and babble of her eyes, when I was not sleeping or cursing the apothecary because he would not tell me in whose house I was lodged, but feigned ignorance because I was a child in his hands and he had no fear of me.

But one day, when the rascal had bound up my wound, I caught him by the neck and I swore that I would kill him if he did not answer me speedily and with as much truth as a rascal might, since, if he lied to me, he should never breathe another vein after that I was free of my couch.

- "'Tis a good reason for a poor man to love truth," he spluttered, when he had rid his throat of the blood, for I had not thought to find my hands so strong; "and may her ladyship forgive me, but this is the house of the Lord Avonbeg."
  - "Her ladyship!" I exclaimed.
- "Aye, sir, the Lady Barbara, who carried you hither when the rascals had left you."
- "The rascals?" I muttered, for my brain was slow to discover his meaning.
- "The Lady Barbara was returning from my Lord Castleton's rout, when she found by the roadside a gentleman sorely wounded. So she carried you hither, and seeing that my lord was

abroad, she summoned me and bade me keep the life in you, and yet be silent, for if you died or my tongue wagged, I should dance a horn-pipe between earth and heaven for my pains. The lady is very gentle, and as fair as she is gentle "——and he looked at me with great cunning.

"'Tis very true," I answered, "for I have not yet found a woman half so fair. And I dare swear that she is gentle, too, albeit I have made but little trial of it."

"I pray you to remember, sir," he went on, eyeing me eagerly, "that I have served you well."

"That you have," I returned, "and I shall not forget your services."

"The Lady Barbara is very gentle," he said, uneasily, as though 'twas a sin that he confessed.

"'Twere a sin to doubt it," I answered, "and I would set my honour upon it."

"I would not have her ladyship think that I had a wagging tongue," he protested.

"She shall think you dumb," I answered. He spread out his hands, making me a bow. "'Tis a great honour to serve Sir Phelim Burke," he said, and the lines about his eyes deepened.

"'Tis a great honour to have served the Lady Barbara," I cried, impatiently, for the fellow's company was becoming wearisome.

"Aye, 'tis very true," he replied, turning his face to the ground, "since the honour is doubled, for I think Sir Phelim Burke will stand before my Lord Castleton."

"At eight paces," I said; "or less, if need be."

"And in my lady's heart," cried the rascal, and before I could answer he had left me.

Then I fell into a deep slumber, and dreamed sweetly that the Lady Barbara kissed my lips after that I had hipped Sir Peter in the Friar's Field. And then I thought that I was in the company of my friends and that they drank to the Lady Barbara and to Sir Phelim's heir that should be, at which my lady's cheek grew very red. So I lifted the wine to my lips and called out as loud as I could, "The Lady Barbara"; and at this I awoke, and, opening my eyes, saw the Lady Barbara looking down upon me.

She was clad in white, as I had seen her before, save that she wore no jewels and her eyes were tender.

My brain was so filled with the folly of my dream that I could only gaze at her face, not daring to speak lest I was still dreaming and she would leave me if I woke.

- "I fear, sir," she said, at length, seeing that I did not speak, "that you are in great pain."
- "I do not feel it, Madam," I returned, watching her face.
- "Yet I heard you cry out as if in pain," she went on.
  - "'Twas only my dream," I said.
  - "And an ill one, I dare swear," she returned.
- "Nay, Madam," I cried. "But so sweet a dream that I would it might return."
- "Then, sir," she said, coldly, "I will leave you to the merrier company of your dreams."
- "I pray that you will not leave me until you have heard how sweet a dream it was," I broke out.

She made me a courtesy, but did not answer. Then I told her what I had dreamed, and how the Lady Barbara had kissed my lips. At this, the blood filled her cheeks, and her eyes were downcast.

- "'Tis a foolish dream," she murmured.
- "I would that it might return," I answered, "for I make no doubt 'twould quickly make me whole again."

Then she came near to me.

- "Sir," she said, and her voice was as soft as her cheek, "I have wronged you so greatly that I must refuse you nothing in honour to undo the wrong and make you whole again."
- "Then, Madam, you must first kiss me as you did in my dream," I answered.

So she bent down and pressed her lips to my brow. But I cried out that it was not so in my dream, and, if she were to make me whole, she must kiss my lips.

- "'Twere no easy matter for a maid," she returned.
- "Yet I dare swear 'tis easier than what must follow," I said, seeing the tumult in her bosom.
- "I pray you deal gently with me," she whispered, kissing me on the mouth, "for I have suffered greatly, fearing lest you should die."

"And that the rascals had put me to sleep," I made answer.

At this she broke out laughing.

- "The rogue has been false to me," she said, "yet I thought of your honour, and would not have them say that Sir Phelim Burke was laid by a woman."
- "I care not what they say," I broke out, "if you will marry me."
- "Since you would have an heir," she said, softly.
- "Since I would have a wife, if the Lady Barbara will give me her heart," I cried. "If she will not, then I will never marry, not even to save my honour."
- "Indeed 'tis yours," she murmured, "and has been so for many days."
  - "And you will marry me?" I said.
- "When my lord wishes," she answered, kneeling before me and laying her head upon my breast.

So it was that I got me a wife, and won a thousand guineas from my cousin Roger. And a great company of my friends came to Kilrea to do us honour and to drink to my

lady in buttered claret, as they had done in my dream. But none knew other of the matter than that I had been set upon by rascals on a sudden and laid before I could draw upon them, for so the Lady Barbara had made it known to save my honour.

And as for Sir Peter, when I did not come to the Friar's Field on the third day as I had promised, he swore by his honour that the stag was as brown as a berry, and proved it by blazing at three of his friends who had denied it, and, albeit he was winged himself, yet he had hipped two of them very prettily, because he loved me and was jealous of my honour.

## CHAPTER IV

## MASTER PEACEFUL

## Wherein Toby Mathew wins a Bride and shames a Braggart

"A PISTOL between me and my friend but never the face of a woman," Toby Mathew would cry when the wine had heated him and loosed his tongue. And Dick Daly drank the toast as often as it pleased his friend and the wine was to his liking, swearing over the buttered claret that he would sooner put his dearest friend Tony to sleep in the Friar's Field than let a woman's lips sour his wine Whereupon Tony would kiss his cheek because he hated women and loved Dick Daly as greatly as he loved his honour.

But Daly loved women a little more than his wine and but little less than his pistols. So it

was that when the Lady Pamela met him at Lord Ambrose's rout and smiled upon him, he no longer remembered his pledge but thought only of her lips and of the light in her eyes. And she, since she was a woman, was proud to have him kneel to her, seeing that he rode straight and was near as sure with the barkers as was Sir Miles Bagenal, and still more because he was the friend of Toby Mathew, whose eye had never rested on her face, albeit she had ridden neck and neck with him when they had killed the fox at the Monk's Cloister.

But Dick Daly scarce looked upon the wine, and let the jest pass, not heeding the laughter. Neither had he any thought for his hair-triggers, albeit Roger Blake had laughed loud enough to give warrant for a meeting. Yet his eye was bright and the blood in his cheek, so that Toby Mathew feared lest he had caught a fever and needed blood-letting, because the butter grew cold upon his claret. So when they had drunk to the memory of young Terence Butler, whom Roger Blake had that same morning put to sleep in the Friar's Field,

Dick Daly flung himself into the saddle and left the wine and the company behind him.

'Twas but three days later that a letter was brought to Toby Mathew bidding him to Gortmore to drink in Dick Daly's wedding day. So Toby, with a chill at his heart and his head on fire, dressed himself all in black and mounting his horse took the road to Gortmore.

Now Dick Daly had dressed himself very gaily in silk for his wedding, since it was in his mind to drink with his friend until it was near the hour when the Lady Pamela should meet him. So that when he saw his friend, he cried out at him in amaze.

- "Lord sakes, Toby, 'twas a wedding not a funeral that I bade you to. Come, drink to the Lady Pamela whose mouth is sweeter than wine," and he set the cup in his friend's hand.
- "The Lady Pamela," Toby repeated as though the name had no meaning for him.
- "Aye, the Lady Pamela, the most beautiful and most virtuous lady in the Kingdom."

Then Toby raised the cup to his lips and drained it in silence. So they began drinking and there was silence between them, for Toby's

heart was heavy and Dick's heart full of song, that fluttered on his lips. When it was but little past dawn and the wine beginning to stale, Toby rose, and lifting his cup, called upon his friend to drink to a toast. And Dick sprang to his feet gladly and smiled, holding his cup near his lips.

- "Here's to the friend whom I loved and who has betrayed me," Toby Mathew cried out, "drink, I bid you drink to a traitor!"
- "To a traitor!" Daly returned, and his face was pale.
  - "Aye, to a traitor."
  - "His name?"
  - "Dick Daly."

The sudden blood darkened Daly's face. He drew back an instant; then flung the cup full in the face of his friend. Toby Mathew sighed heavily, and brushed the wine from his cheek.

- "Sir, I am at your service, whether with the sword or with point-blankers," he said, making a low bow.
- "I have little leisure, seeing what is before me," Daly returned, "so let it be point-blankers

at a hand-gallop. My lady will love me the better, that I have rid the country of a cowardly churl!"

When they had seen to the priming of their barkers they went out, and mounting their horses, rode slowly away from one another, until a hundred paces lay between them. Then, wheeling round, they spurred swiftly towards each other, and both barkers blazed together. Toby Mathew's horse fell forward, for he had caught the ball in his head, but Dick Daly lay upon the grass with a hole in his side. Toby freed himself from the stirrups and sprang to his feet. The cloud passed from his mind when he saw Dick lying still, and the white satin soaking his blood. In an instant he was on his knees, and had clutched his friend to his heart.

Daly opened his eyes, smiling a little.

- "'Twas a good blood-letting," he said.
- "A pipe of claret will give it back to you," Toby whispered.
- "I shall drink no more. 'Twas a straight shot, a straight shot. But 'tis proud I am to be laid by my dearest friend. You love me, Toby?"

- "As dearly as my honour and a thousand times more than my life," the other returned, his voice shaking.
  - "The Lady Pamela waits," Daly murmured.
- "I would not have her dishonoured, since she is to be married to-day."
  - "So she shall, Dick, I swear it."
  - "By your honour?"
- "Aye, by my honour," and Toby Mathew kissed his friend's cheek.

So when the Lady Pamela waited at the church, 'twas not Dick Daly but Toby Mathew that came to greet her.

He bowed low before her, lower than ever he had bent to a woman.

- "Madam," he said, "I pray you to forgive me that I have come so late."
- "You are forgiven, indeed, sir," she returned, "since I had not looked for your coming, but for that of another."
  - "In whose stead I am come."
  - " Ah!"

Upon this the Lord Ambrose strode forward with an angry brow.

- "Sir," he cried, "I know not what fooling this is, but we wait for Mr. Daly."
  - "He will not come."
- "By my soul he shall or he shall answer for it," and my lord laid his hand on his hilt.
- "Nay, my lord," Toby returned, "since I have come in his stead to answer for his sins and my own." Then turning to the Lady Pamela, who had listened with burning cheek, he said, "Madam, Toby Mathew begs the honour of leading the Lady Pamela to his home."

But my Lord drew his sword and swore that it should not be. The Lady Pamela hesitated a moment, then, smiling sweetly, laid her hand upon Toby's arm.

- "Sir," she said, "you honour me so greatly that I find no words to refuse you."
- "I am but a poor wooer," he answered, "yet I dare swear that I can protect a lady's honour."
- "I would wager my life upon it," she returned, and she cared little that his voice was rough, because Roger Blake had put a ball

in it last Christmas, and the frost had got into it before the wound was closed.

So Toby Mathew and the Lady Pamela were wedded, and a great company drank to their health, and to the memory of Dick Daly. But not for some days after did Lady Pamela learn that Dick Daly was dead, and that Toby had killed him; but for this I think she loved her husband the more, because he had shown himself the straighter shot, and more because he had a handsome presence, and had ever been a scorner of women.

Now 'twas not many months after his wedding when Toby Matthew was caught by a strange humour, swearing that he had killed his friend foully, and in no honourable fashion, so that when I was born he covered his face and cried out that I was a child of blood and the witness of his dishonour. My mother was at much pains to heal the disorder, but when she could not, she turned her face to the wall, no longer taking pride, because she had borne a man-child to so handsome and gallant a gentleman as Toby Mathew was.

Then Mary Devlin took me from the cold

breast and comforted me, as well as she might, and 'twas she who loved my mother, and old Peter Devlin, who loved my father, that told me all that I know of Toby Mathew and of the Lady Pamela, before I was old enough to grieve, and to wish that my father's hand had erred when he met Dick Daly at a hand-gallop.

Now, had it not been for Peter, I was in danger to grow up knowing none of those things which a gentleman has need of, to ride straight, and to handle the barkers as my forbears had done. And in truth I had much ado to prevail upon him, through fear of my father's anger, albeit it grieved him sorely to think of the days when many gentlemen would come to drink buttered claret, and Toby Mathew was the gayest and most dare-devil amongst them. So when he had pledged me to be silent about the matter, he taught me, in secret, how to balance a point-blanker and hit an apple at sixteen paces, and was proud when I could beat him in sword play, both with my grandfather's rapier, Skiver-the-Pullet, and with my father's sabre, Slash.

But of all this, my father knew nothing,

since he scarce ever looked upon me, but, if I met him, he would stare beyond me, as though the sight of me was distasteful. So I had no lack of leisure to play with old Peter, and to hear from him tales of my father's youth, and I swore to make him proud of his son, and may be win a place in his heart.

One day Sir Roger Blake rode to Grange, and when he had drunk wine with my father, his tongue began to wag so that he cried out upon his friend because he had never yet seen me upon the grass, whether upon the Down of Clapook or in the Friar's Field.

- "I would have my son a man of peace, Roger," my father returned.
- "A man of peace, Toby," cried out the other, "I would have him rather a man of honour."
  - "He shall be both."
- "So you bring him up like a girl. Shame upon you that the lad has neither smelt powder, nor kissed a lady's hand, and he near the age of a man."

And Sir Roger flung himself into the saddle.

But I, peeping in upon them, saw my

father's cheek redden and such a fire in his eyes as I had never seen before. Then, while I still watched him, he went to his pistol-case and, taking out his hair-triggers, he handled them lovingly as I thought, bringing the flints to his eye. At last he put them back into the case with a sigh, and I heard him mutter, "A man of peace, he shall be a man of peace." But there was a great sorrow in his face as though he found little comfort in peace.

Now 'twas Sir Roger's words reminded me that I was a man, and how my father dishonoured me by using me as a girl, albeit I was full as tall as he, and could lift old Peter from the ground with a single hand. My heart grew hot to think how he scorned his own and my mother's blood in me, and I came to a resolve that I would take my sword and pistols, and mounting my horse beg Sir Roger to set me upon the road to fortune.

But when I was near ready to set out, news was brought me that Sir Roger was struck down in the Friar's Field, so that I must seek another counsellor. Thus it came about that I delayed until the Lady Helen Butler came

to Grange. Since I knew nothing of women, I thought them all beautiful when once I had seen her face. And my father loved her quickly, because he had loved her father, and more because of her beauty and spirit, so that soon he forget to be sad, remembering his youth and gallantry in the sound of her laughter.

And I too learned to kiss her hand, and after a little found courage to look in her eyes, and dare the mocking that was in them, because I was a man and feared nothing save her coldness. And she, knowing it, played with my heart, and at times was cold, stirring me to anger so that she might feel her power and drive the frown from my brow. And old Peter went about with his eyes on the ground because he knew that the lady was pledged to wed her kinsman, Sir Ralph Owen, in the winter. But of this I made little at the time, since women had been so far from me all my life, that I had no thought to possess the comeliest of them.

So I rode with the Lady Helen when the weather was fair, or leaned by the spinet when the rain kept us indoors. At times I caught my father's eye fixed upon me furtively, yet

could never hold his gaze or know if his face showed the softening of his heart.

When I learned that Sir Ralph was coming to Grange to visit his betrothed, my heart was sorely smitten, so that I was dull when I went forth to gather flowers with the Lady Helen.

- "Have you lost your tongue, sir?" she asked, when she had waited for me to speak.
  - "I am no speechmaker," I returned.
- "Yet you are young enough to boast of killing your friends and of women's favours."
- "Your Ladyship must pardon me, since I have never been to the Court."

At this she looked keenly at me, as though she suspected something beneath my words.

- "Make haste, then, and go thither," she cried, "since a lady loves a braggart better than a dumb companion."
- "Yet dumb service is wont to be better than lip service," I said, "and so I carry your flowers."

She made me a courtesy.

"'Tis a noble service," she returned mocking me, "and one without danger. You are indeed a man of peace."

"So my father would have me," I returned bitterly.

Her lip curled with scorn.

"A worthy ambition," she exclaimed; "give me the flowers."

Without a word, I gave her the flowers, and taking them she turned her back upon me.

So I bowed and left her. But I had not gone a dozen paces when she called after me very sweetly bidding me return.

- "Are you angry?" she asked.
- "Nay, Madam, I feel no anger," I made answer. A little frown puckered her brow.
- "I would that you might. Yet 'tis a very Christian virtue to forgive them that despite-fully use you. Pray, sir, carry my flowers," and she sighed.

I knew what was in her mind, yet out of the bitterness of my heart I let her grieve to think that Toby Mathew's son had no thought for his honour.

On the same evening Sir Ralph Owen came to Grange. He was a young man very gaily dressed, with a ready tongue and some wit. When he knelt to kiss the Lady Helen's hand,

which he did gracefully enough, I saw that she was proud of his handsome face and courtly manner. And when the wine began to flow, his mouth grew full of boasting of the fine things he had said and done at Court, and of the fire-eaters whom he had laid in the Nine Acres. And hearing him the Lady Helen's eyes grew brighter, and when they fell upon me, she sighed gently, grieved doubtless because I was so much in the shadow of his brilliance. And my father looked not at all at me, but kept his eyes upon his guest's face.

At length Sir Ralph turned to me and begged the honour of drinking wine with me.

- "You are a man of peace, sir?" he asked.
- "At your service," I returned bowing.
- "You will be a priest?" he went on.
- "It may be so," I answered, smiling at the Lady Helen.
- "Ah, a noble ambition," he said with great condescension. "I might have been a man of peace myself, but by Gad, sir, those ancestors of mine gave me the fighting blood."

I glanced at my father's face smiling. His cheek was flushed so that I knew his guest had

but ill pleased him. But Sir Ralph loved the sound of his own voice so greatly that he had no thought how it pleased the company.

"By my soul I respect you, sir," he went on addressing himself to me, "albeit a meeting at day-break is more to my liking than a prayer before breakfast. I leave prayers to women. If we sin to win them, why they must pray to save us. Iş it not so, Helen?"

"I think," answered the lady, "that it is the duty of every gallant gentleman to pray with his lips for the favours that he has won with his sword. What say you, Master Peaceful?"

"That a gentleman's sword should be sharper than his tongue and his deeds louder than his voice," I made answer.

"'Tis a good saying is it not, Ralph?"

"Aye, good enough, yet your own was prettier," and he caught his hand to his lips. "I fight with the sword, not with phrases, which better become a man of peace."

I bent my head to hide the anger that was in my eyes.

After this I saw but little of the Lady Helen since she was always in the company of Sir Ralph, whether on horseback or at the spinet, but if I met her her voice was gentle and her eyes pitiful. But as for Sir Ralph, he scarce troubled to address me, albeit I was the son of his host.

One day she found me in the library, whither I was wont to go often so that I might not hear the sound of Sir Ralph's voice, and begged me very sweetly to go riding with her.

- "And Sir Ralph," I asked, "does he not go also?"
- "Yes indeed, he does," she made answer, seeming surprised at the question.
  - "Then I stay."
  - "Not if you would please me."
- "I would do anything to please you," I said kissing her hand.
  - "Except fight for me," she returned.

At this I was silent.

- "I pray you to come," she went on, "and if there be fighting, Sir Ralph shall do it, so that you may pray in peace."
- "Lady Helen, I will ride with you," I said, suddenly coming to a resolve.

So I left her and having dressed myself with great care, I buckled on my father's sword, which I had kept sharp and bright, in secret. Then I came down to the hall, where Sir Ralph and the lady waited. They looked at me in some surprise, for of late I was grown careless of my dress. Then catching sight of the sword Sir Ralph broke into laughter.

"Why, Master Peaceful," he cried, "what will you do with the sword?"

"Wear it as an ornament," I answered, "as many another gentleman does."

At that he laughed again, but the Lady Helen turned her face away.

So I mounted my horse and rode on the lady's left. Thus we rode out of the Hunter's Gap and entered the Valley of the Pines. Sir Ralph and the Lady Helen talked much and their laughter was mingled. But I looked straight before me, betwixt the ears of my horse. And despite his boasting I saw that Sir Ralph rode more like a tailor than a gentleman, seeing that his knees kept a nodding acquaintance with his chin. Yet I held my eyes from them and my ears as deaf as might

be since their words stabbed me. But for all that I could not be ignorant that he spoke of his wedding and she of the rides they had had through the Valley of the Pines, since he had come to Grange.

- "You are silent, sir," said Sir Ralph, after a while.
- "True, sir, for I was never a talker," I returned.
- "Yet you are a man of peace," he went on.
  - "And so I hold my peace," I made answer.
- "For which you shall have the less to answer," he replied with some heat.
  - "The answer is ready," I said.
  - "Yet you carry a sword," he retorted.
- "'Tis the custom," I replied, "and so I pray you to forgive me."
- "And yet 'tis a man's plaything," he broke out, "and so may prove hazardous."
- "I take the risk, sir," I answered with great meekness, "since I am in such gallant company."
  - "But the lady—" he began.
  - "Has a brave gentleman to defend her," I

said, noting that the shadows were falling over the Valley of the Pines.

- "You care nothing for your life," he went on.
  - "I think it is safe," I returned.
- "Yet the Valley is lonely," he said, looking about him.
  - "Not in such company," I retorted.

The Lady Helen was silent, yet her eyes seemed perplexed.

"Sir Ralph shall fight if need be, Master Peaceful," she said, "to give you leisure for your prayers. Yet for me I see naught worthy a gentleman's sword."

- "The Valley of the Pines pleases you?"
- "Aye, that it does," she replied, "else I had not brought Sir Ralph hither so many times. You ride well, Master Peaceful, and have a very proper figure;" and she sighed, as though I scarce deserved it.

So we rode on faster and my heart leaped seeing the colour in her cheek.

Now we had not gone a great way, when I espied before us a big red coach. It travelled so slowly that we were quickly beside

it. The windows were shuttered and the driver seemed to sleep. Sir Ralph cried out angrily to the fellow to make way. Whereupon he turned his head and gazed at the Lady Helen. Then cracking his whip he wheeled his horses across the road. On the instant, the door of the coach was thrown open and three men sprang to our horses' heads. I drew my sword and slashed at the fellow in front of me, but before I could reach him he had cut the bridle reins at the bit. So I leapt to the ground and made at the rascal who held the Lady Helen's bridle, but two swords were instantly drawn upon me so that I was at much pains to defend myself.

After a little he who pressed me hardest, cried out to me to yield since I had no hope against two. But the blood was in my eyes.

- "Never, while I have a drop of blood in me," I burst out. "Toby Mathew has been a man of peace for too long, now he will wipe out his dishonour."
- "Toby Mathew," cried the other, dropping his sword.
  - "Aye, Toby Mathew," I answered.

At that he swept off his hat and bowed low.

- "Sir, I had not hoped to meet the son of my father's friend in the company of a coward."
  - "A coward," I repeated.
- "Aye, a coward," he returned, pointing up the Valley where Sir Ralph's horse was already mounting the crest of the hill.
- "'Tis a most valorous gentleman from the Court," I made answer, "yet I think your rough usage has offended him," and I looked at the Lady Helen. She sat in the saddle, seeming like one but half awakened from a dream.
- "Sir," I said, "we waste time for I would fain escort the lady to Grange."
- "That shall not be, while I live," he cried, "for I have sworn to wed the Lady Helen to-day."
- "Then you are perjured, since I shall put you to sleep first," I cried.
  - "You would wed her yourself?" he asked.
  - "I confess 'twas in my mind," I returned.
  - "A priest waits for us at the Red Cross."
  - "He shall have leisure to say his prayers."

"I would not have you die unshriven," he said with a smile.

"Have no fear," I answered, "since the Lady Helen will never wed you."

"Yet I have drawn first blood," he went on, pointing to the blood on my hand, and in truth I felt my arm grow stiff.

"'Tis nothing," I returned; "but the lady waits, and we waste time;" and I raised my sword.

"Nay, nay," he cried out; "Phil Roche takes advantage of no man, least of all of a Mathew. Let it be point-blankers at ten paces, and he who stands after two shots shall wed the Lady Helen."

I bowed, and, going to the holsters, took out my father's pistols, which I had put there secretly when I resolved to go to Sir Roger. So I looked to the priming. Then I went to the Lady Helen's side, and, kneeling, kissed her hand.

"Madam," I said, "I would not die and leave you ignorant that I love you. If I live, I pray you to forget."

The colour came softly into her cheeks, and her eyes seemed full of shame.

Then I left her and took my ground. At the signal both pistols blazed together. The ball tore the cloth from my shoulder, grazing the flesh, but Phil Roche stood upright still smiling. So I threw the pistol to the ground, cursing the stiffness of my arm, and took the other. A second time we blazed together, and Phil Roche fell to the ground with a ball in his hip.

Then I made a bow to the others, and returned to the Lady Helen.

"Madam," I said; "it grows late; shall we return to Grange?"

At this she caught my hand to her lips, and the blood from it stained her cheek. Then, without a word, I lifted her into the saddle. As I did so, I espied a sword lying upon the ground. It was Sir Ralph's. I picked it up, and, mounting my horse, carried it with me. Neither did I look once at the Lady Helen while we rode homewards. And, in truth, I was so weak from the bleeding of my wounds, that I had much ado to sit in the saddle.

When we stood at the door, I gave my arm to the lady, and, holding Sir Ralph's sword in

my hand, I led her into the hall. There stood my father, with a flushed and angry face, and his guest pale and irresolute. So, advancing toward Sir Ralph, I made him a low bow.

"Sir," I said, "I have the honour to restore the sword of a coward," and, snapping it upon my knee, I threw the pieces at his feet.

"And I the ring of a dastard," cried Lady Helen, drawing the jewel from her finger and casting it to the ground. Then she turned to me.

"Sir," she burst out, and her eyes were moist, "I have greatly wronged you, listening to the words of this braggart. Punish me as you will, for, alas! I love you;" and she fell at my feet, kissing my hands. But I caught her to my heart and kissed her lips.

"My son is a man of peace—a man of peace," muttered my father, and a strange light came into his face.

## CHAPTER V

#### A LOVER OF WINE

Relating how Dick Delahunt met Phyllis Standish, and how the Lady kept her Pledge

My father used money but ill, so that in time it would no longer continue in his service. But for that he cared little, seeing that he had many friends to love him, and so long as the wine flowed and he had good company to drink it with him, Dick Delahunt was not the man to rail against fortune. Yet he was proud of his moderation, and when he had reached the ninth bottle, would cry out against those who so misused good liquor as to drink excessively. He loved peace greatly and praised it in the daytime, but at night, if the claret was to his liking, he would set his friends right and meet them in the morning.

So it was that he had many bones broken

and the wine made him remember his wounds. He was all for point-blankers and railed at sword-play since Roger Blake put a ball in his wrist, and when his friend Miles Bagenal had hipped him on the Down of Clapook, he swore against the saddle and cursed the days that he had spent in it.

When at last he could neither walk to the table nor away from it, but must be carried, he thanked God that he was able to carry his liquor so much the better—when others carried him.

He had loved many women, and one of them had been proud to wed him and to die of his coldness when she had borne him a son and he had squandered her fortune. After that, when he was in his cups, he would curse the day when she died, making oath that he had loved her. Yet he would fly into a passion if one declared that he saw any likeness in me to my mother, swearing that I was a man's son, and that there was no puling woman about me. Once, too, when he found me weeping because my hound Rory was dead, he struck me on the cheek, crying out that I was a bastard and none of his begetting.

But when I cast the lie in his teeth, and swore that he should own me as his son or meet me with the pistols, he shouted for joy, and catching me to his breast, kissed my cheek, declaring that he was proud of his son, and that I had my father's spirit.

Then I must needs drink with him. Whereupon he grew so tender over me, that he wept to think how short a life he had, for all the world as though he were a woman.

And, in truth, he was near to death and the gout troublesome, for not ten days later, he drank his buttered claret and lay down heavily and never rose again.

So at twenty-three I came into a broken fortune and a name made honourable by straight shooting and hard drinking. But when my father was put to rest in the churchyard of St. Dominic and his friends had drunk to his virtues in buttered claret till the morning, I was left with an empty money-chest and scarce another bottle in the cellar.

Now I loved the saddle, a pretty face, and a quarrel to season my wine, but most I loved good company and hated to be

solitary. When the sunlight fell upon the empty bottle and lonely seats, I felt my father's chair too big for me and my heart tightened. Then I must needs summon old Peter Murtagh to fetch another bottle. So he set the wine by me, whimpering because I sat in my father's seat, and old Dick Delahunt would never crack another bottle of his laying.

- "'Tis a sorrowful day, Peter," I said, putting the wine to my lips.
- "Aye, that it is, sir," he returned, wiping his eyes. "I never knew one half so sorrowful."
  - "You were my father's faithful servant."
  - "He was a good master."
- "And repaid you with—his love," I went on, for my father's voice was softer when he cursed old Peter than when he bade a friend welcome.
- "He was a gallant old gentleman and thought little of money."
  - "So he has left little," I returned.
- "He had a fine scorn of it," said Peter, "and God be good to him, for he loved the wine."
- "Aye, that he did," I made answer. "I think I'll be leaving Clapook."

"Leaving Clapook?" Peter cried out, gazing at me as though I had lost my wit. "The old master would have died before he left Clapook. God rest him, 'twould break his heart to think of it." And he burst into tears.

His grief shook my resolve, for in truth the thought of leaving my home was bitter to me.

"Leave me," I said. "I would be alone."

Now albeit the Delahunts thought but little of money and were wont to trouble themselves not at all about the future, so there was abundance of wine from France in the cellar, yet my mother's family was used to set great store by the gold pieces, so that my father hated them and when he was in his cups would curse them roundly but chiefly Bryan Standish, my mother's cousin who was a banker in Holland and reputed of great wealth.

"I shall die as I have lived, boy," he would cry, when the wine had filled him with wonder at his own virtues and scorn of his enemies. "Let the knave keep his scurvy guineas since he has sold his honour for them, but Dick Delahunt will go to sleep, when his time comes, with his honour clean and owe no rascal

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a service." Then he would pledge me over the wine, to be as jealous of my honour as he was of his, when I sat in his place.

Now I had no such scorn of my kinsman's guineas, seeing that there was but little more than a hundred gold pieces in the chest, and I knew not where to find others to take their place when they were gone. So the more I thought on the matter, the more proper did it seem that my kinsman should fill my father's empty money-chest, lest his son should fail to keep his pledge to live as his forbears had done.

But 'twas not till I had passed the sixth bottle that I came to a resolve that I would never leave Clapook, but would write to my kinsman telling him that Dick Delahunt was dead, and had left his son but few guineas wherewith to support the family honour, since he had full confidence in his kinsman's spirit.

Now I had but little skill with the pen, yet with the help of a fresh bottle of wine I wrote the letter, and when I had read it over more than once, it pleased me greatly. So when I had despatched it, I troubled myself no longer

concerning the matter, but drank with my friends as I had been used to, and as my father had taught me. And the smile came back to old Peter's face, when I spoke no longer of leaving Clapook, and he brought the wine cheerfully, albeit there was little left of it for a man of many friends.

'Twas scarce thirty days after my father's death, and my gold pieces were all but gone, when I received a letter from my kinsman, Bryan He was grieved, he declared, to Standish. learn of Dick Delahunt's death, the more especially since he found nothing to admire in his manner of dying. He was highly honoured by my desire to spend his guineas, which however he had a use for other than to waste them in wine and such follies. Of good counsel, of which I had greater need than of gold pieces, he would give me abundance, when I was in the mood to benefit by it, and he besought me to believe that wisdom was more precious than gold.

Now I confess that my kinsman's letter grieved me sorely, and more for shame at his unworthy love of his guineas, since he was my

mother's cousin, than because I had looked for much pleasure in the spending of them. answered him quickly that I had no great love for gold, but was minded to live always as a gentleman ought, with my sword clean and my pistols ready. And as for his counsel I had no need for it, seeing that I had not thought to become a money-changer. Then I besought him that he might not set so great store by riches, seeing that even gold grew tarnished in idleness, and a guinea became fairer in the handling. prayed him to come to Clapook that he might learn how to live before the time came for him to die, which I judged to be not far distant. for me, I was resolved to go to sleep, as my father had, with a full stomach and the wine on my lips.

After this, I thought no more of my kinsman, save in the mornings when my blood was hot with wine. Then I would curse him for a sourfaced water-drinker who had brought disgrace upon honest blood. And through this, too, I went near to lose my dearest friend, since Miles Barrington when in his cups remembered my words, and cried out against the blood of

a money-changer, so that for my honour's sake I must needs meet him upon the Down of Clapook and put a ball in his side from which he has not wholly mended to this day.

At length seeing that my purse was near empty, I bethought me how I might fill it again, so that for the honour of my name, my friends should not come to Clapook, and have naught wherein to drink to me and to my father's memory. So of a sudden I came to a resolve that I would take to the road and lighten the heavy purses of such as lacked wit or courage to defend them; nor could I discover a more honourable calling, nor one more befitting a gentleman of blood, than to set his life against a well-lined pocket.

Thus it was that when the shadows of the evening began to fall, I looked to the priming of my pistols, and mounting my horse, rode down through the Valley of the Pines. The clouds were heavy with the promise of a storm, and the wind filled my ears with sound.

As I turned by the Hunter's Gap, suddenly I saw a coach by the roadside. The shadows were thick about it, so that I could discern

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nothing save that it was motionless. Drawing a pistol from the holster, I rode down upon it. One of the horses had fallen and lay still upon the ground, while beside it stood a gentleman of a most grave and dignified appearance. He gazed at me calmly as I drew rein beside him.

- "Ha, sir," he said, with his eye on my pistol, "so you would add to my troubles?"
- "Nay, sir," but would lessen the weight of your cares," I returned, thinking of his purse.
- "Yet a pistol on the cock has an unfriendly look," he went on, eyeing me narrowly.
  - "'Tis a good friend at need, sir," I said.
- "It has served me ill," he retorted, pointing to the fallen horse. Then I saw that the beast had been shot in the head.
  - "How did it come about?" I asked.
- "A rascal came suddenly upon us, shot my horse ere I could parley with him, and frightened my servant near out of his wits."
- "Yet he might have done worse," I answered, thinking of the guineas.
- "And has robbed me of my purse," he went on, with a smile.

"The villain!" I cried out, for the loss of the purse troubled me nearly.

Then I came nearer to the coach and sprang to the ground. But he stood before me as though he would keep me back, and I noted that the window was shuttered.

"Sir," he said, with much dignity, "I am a man of peace and so carry no weapons, neither would it please me to take the life of a fellow-creature even if I should thereby save my money. If you be a man of honour, as you seem, I pray you to direct me to the nearest inn where I may obtain rest and food, for I have but little hope to see my servant before day-break, and it is an ill night to loiter abroad." And he drew his cloak about him.

I know not how it was, but his words troubled my heart.

"Sir," I burst out, returning the pistol to the holster, "I will lead you thither myself, and I swear by my honour that no harm shall befall you while you are in my company."

He took his hat from his head and bowed.

"I thank you, sir," he returned. "In truth God sends us trouble, but seldom without its

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antidote. First a rascal robs me, and then you, sir, give me your protection."

I knew not what to answer him, seeing what had been in my mind, so I bowed low before him. Then I set about cutting the harness from the dead horse that I might leave his comrade free to draw the coach. As I did so, I glanced at the window. 'Twas no longer shuttered as it had been, and as I looked, suddenly a pair of very dark eyes met mine an instant.

I turned to the old man.

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- "You do not travel alone, sir," I said.
- "Nay, sir," he replied, with some uneasiness, "my daughter shares my dangers."
- "I beg you to believe that they are over," I answered, turning to the coach.

Again he bowed gravely to me.

"My daughter will add her thanks to mine, when she is rested," he said; "now I think she sleeps."

I could have sworn that she did not, for again I saw the dark eyes flash from the window, so that my heart was strangely stirred. Then having freed the dead horse from the

coach we crossed the Hunter's Gap, and made for the sign of the Three Fiddlers.

So I went with them until we were come to the inn. Then albeit I desired much to greet the lady of the dark eyes, I was for turning back but the old gentleman would not listen to me.

"Nay, sir," he cried, "that must not be, since you have been our friend in adversity. I beg you to stay with us until we may thank you more fittingly. I pray that you will sup with us, if you are at leisure."

"That I will very readily, when I have looked to my horse," I answered, seeing that my business had failed and my purse was still empty.

Then bowing, I turned from him, ere the door of the coach was opened, that I might warn the inn-keeper to use me as a stranger, lest it should be suspected who I was.

When I had stabled my horse, I sought mine host of the inn and bade him speak no word to his guests concerning my name and station.

- "'Tis a most noble gentleman," said he.
- "And the lady?" I asked.

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"May I die to-morrow, if ever I have seen one half so beautiful," he cried.

At this I broke out laughing.

"May you live a thousand years," I said, "for albeit I have seen naught but her eyes, I would wager my honour that you are right."

"She is proud, too, I'll warrant, though her lips be soft. 'Tis a brave man will find her heart." And he looked at me as though I hid a secret from him.

"Seeing that her eyes are so bright, she should know a proper man from a craven," I made answer; "yet of her lips I know as little as I do of her heart, and for thinking on such things I have no leisure. An empty stomach makes a poor gallant."

"The gentleman awaits you," said a servant behind me, "and supper is served."

On the threshold of the supper chamber the old gentleman stood waiting. He stretched out both his hands to welcome me, drawing me into the chamber. He had cast off his cloak, and I noted that he was richly dressed, albeit with a show of plainness, and that he wore his

own hair, which was white and without powder. His face was singularly handsome, and his smile sweet, so that I made little doubt that he was no common person.

"Phyllis," he cried, still holding my hand, "this is our friend, the good Samaritan who helped us thither after that we were fallen among thieves. Pray thank him for so welcome a service."

"Indeed I do thank you, sir," she answered, making me a courtesy and smiling very sweetly, "both for my own sake and for my father's. And I would that so brave a gentleman had been at hand to teach the rogue a lesson. Alas, my father wears no sword."

I bowed low before her, finding no words to answer.

"I am a man of peace," her father replied, "and is it not written that they who draw the sword shall perish by the sword?"

At that she laughed, I thought with some scorn.

"I am but a woman, and so should doubtless love peace," she made answer; "yet had I a pistol you should have kept your guineas, and

the rogue should be lying where the poor beast now is, and in a like case."

She stood by the fire and her eyes flashed. Now that I had leisure to observe her, I noted how fair she was. She had not much stature, but she carried her head proudly, and the slope of her neck and shoulders was graceful. Her face was pale, with a ready flush, her forehead low and curtained by black wavy hair. The jewels flashed upon her fingers, as she held back her robe showing the silver buckles upon her shoes. I thought that never before had I seen so fair a woman nor one half so proud, as the curve of her lips showed her to be.

"Madam," I answered, making her a low bow, "I seek no greater honour than to draw in your service."

Her face flushed and her eyes grew softer, so that I knew them the colour of hazel, yet they were ever changing.

She made me a little courtesy.

- "For so gallant a speech, I find no answer," she said, smiling.
  - "There is but one answer," I returned.
  - "And that, sir?" she inquired.

To accept the service," I went on, watching her face. The colour in her cheeks grew warmer and her eyes fell before mine.

- "The sword of a gentleman," she murmured, as her father poured out the wine.
  - "Aye, the sword of a gentleman," I repeated.
- "Why, it is a noble gift, and such that a woman loves," she answered. "I do, indeed, accept the service, if ever there should be need of it."
- "That or another, so you do not forget me," I went on, and had little thought of her father's presence.
- "A Standish never forgets," she cried, lifting her head proudly.
  - "Standish!" I echoed, and my head swam.
- "You know the name?" the old man broke in.
- "I have heard the name of Bryan Standish," I answered, without raising my eyes from the wine, for the strangeness of the thing made me think it a dream.
- "'Tis my own name," he said. "I have a kinsman not far from here, young Richard Delahunt of Clapook, whose father is but lately

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dead. It may be that you know him, since you have heard my name."

- "Aye, I know him well, none better," I returned, while Phyllis fixed her eyes eagerly upon my face.
  - "And are his friend?" she burst out.
- "Nay, madam, but, I fear, his bitterest enemy."

At that her eyes grew dark with anger.

- "I pray you to remember, sir, that he is our kinsman," she returned, haughtily.
- "I am not like to forget it," I made answer, whereupon she turned her face from me.
- "I am grieved to hear you speak so of my young kinsman, sir," said the old man without anger; "yet I fear that Richard Delahunt is in need of a friend because he has not deserved to find one."
- "Nay, sir," I broke out, "that he is not, since no man has more friends than he, and had he guineas in like measure, he would be a rich man this day."
- "I could have sworn that he had friends to love him," cried Phyllis, "albeit his kinsman scorns him."

"I would that he were rich in virtues," said he; "yet I fear that he loves wine greatly."

"It is very true, since he is his father's son," and I raised the wine to my lips.

"Then I will drink to him in wine," Phyllis broke in. "Here is to my kinsman, Richard Delahunt, the bravest man in the kingdom, the straightest shot and noblest comrade, and God send him luck."

She rose to her feet, holding the red wine near her lips. Then seeing that her father still remained seated, she cried shame upon him. "Is he not our kinsman, and have we not come a long journey to learn of him, and perchance to save him, if need be, from his enemies?" and she looked angrily at me.

"Since you desired it so greatly, Phyllis," he answered.

"Then drink to him, for I swear that I shall save him."

So he rose to his feet, but I remained staring before me, with my heart throbbing in my head.

"Sir," she said, looking scornfully upon me, "I have given you a toast."

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"'Tis not to my liking," I returned, seeking to anger her, since it was very sweet to me to hear her defend her kinsman.

"Then I shall make it better," she cried.

"Here is to my kinsman, Dick Delahunt, whom I will wed, if he ask me, or die a maid, for I swear that I love him, albeit I have never set eyes upon him. Drink, father."

My heart leaped at her words, so that I went near to reveal who I was, longing greatly to kiss the lips that defended me so bravely.

- "'Tis an unseemly jest, Phyllis," the old man broke out, with some anger in his voice.
- "'Tis no jest," she cried, looking scornfully at me, "for I swear that I will wed my kinsman, Dick Delahunt, should he seek me."
  - "A lover of wine," he began.
- "He shall be a lover of mine. Drink father, for our honour's sake."

So he put the wine to his lips and drank it as though it were vinegar.

Then the lady turned to me.

- "Sir," she said, "but a little while ago, you pledged yourself to do me a service."
  - "'Tis very true," I answered.

- "Now I would have you fulfil your pledge, if you be a man of honour."
- "I have been accounted such," I returned. "What would you have me do?"
- "No very great deed in truth," she went on, "but only to go hence without delay."
- "He is my guest, and so he shall stay," said her father.
- "Yet he is pledged to me, and if he be a man of honour he will do my bidding," she returned, and her face was aflame.
- "I will do your bidding, Madam," I replied.
  - "Without delay?"
- "With no more than to say farewell," I said, rising to my feet.
- "Then go with all speed to Clapook, seek my kinsman, Dick Delahunt, and say to him that Phyllis Standish loves him and——"

But at this she was silent and her lips trembled. I stood before her with bent head, waiting for her to speak and watching the heaving of her bosom.

"I await your message, Madam," I said, seeing that she remained silent.

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"And that I will be his friend, and if he seek it will wed him," she burst out passionately.

So I bowed to them both and went out.

"A lover of wine," said her father.

"A woman's lover he shall be," said his daughter.

And I heard naught else for the jingling of my spurs.

Then I flung myself into the saddle and rode quickly, taking the road to Clapook. 'Twas some before I could think clearly on what had happened, and how near I had been to my own undoing. But my heart was hot with triumph to think that I had found so true a friend as Phyllis and that the fairest woman in the kingdom was pledged to marry me.

No sooner had I reached Clapook than I despatched a message to my kinsman bidding him welcome, and another to Phyllis, swearing that I loved her and would fain wed her at noon in the chapel at Clapook. Then having dressed myself as gaily as might be, I summoned my friends, bidding them come to Clapook to drink in my wedding-day, for that I

was pledged to wed the daughter of my kinsman.

So they came, and all night buttered claret flowed and mellowed the jest and made soft the well-wishing. And at noon we went down to the Chapel, I leading and my friends following, to greet my kinsman and my bride. But when she stepped from the coach and perceived who it was that would wed her, she gave a little cry, catching her father's arm. But he held out his hand to me, and the cloud left his brow.

- "Are you indeed my kinsman, Richard Delahunt?" he said. Then before I could reply my friends answered him, crying out, "Dick Delahunt for ever!"
- "Sir," I said, "I pray you to forgive me, if I have deceived you."
- "I owe you thanks for a double service," he returned.
  - "Yet he is a lover of wine," said Phyllis.
- "And of beauty," I answered, kissing her hand.
  - "Yet you have deceived me," she murmured.
  - "Since I would know how much you love me."

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"'Twas my kinsman whom I loved."

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- "You repent of your pledge?" I said.
- "'Tis very late for repentance," and she glanced at the guests.
  - "They shall think it a jest," I went on.
  - "To play with a woman's heart?"
- "For a woman to mock a man's eyes, with a wedding dress."
- "Since a monk might make a better wooer," she retorted.
- "Within the cloister," I said, taking her hand and leading her into the chapel, while the others remained without.
  - "'Tis a sacred place."
  - "To love," I made answer.
- "Shall I be wed without wooing?" she complained.
- "I shall woo you to the end of my life," I cried, and caught her to my heart. So I held her till she cried out that she loved me, begging me deal gently with her, since she loved me so greatly and would die of my coldness.

So seeking a full purse and no wife, I found both.

And that day my friends pledged me and the

mistress of Clapook in buttered claret, and Bryan Standish praised the wine and drank as deep as the best of them. Nor did he blame me any longer for loving the wine, since I loved his daughter, and soon he grew to love it himself and take a pride in the bottle, as though he had been bred to it.

But of my resolve, on the night that I met Bryan Standish and his daughter by the wayside, none knows anything save Phyllis, who read it in my eyes, and old Peter, and love has made both their lips silent on the matter.

### CHAPTER VI

#### A DEBT OF HONOUR

Wherein Rick Crosbie pays the Debt and saves his Kinsman's Honour

My uncle was a man of a quick temper, hating many words, for himself was slow of speech. Yet he loved a song and the chink of a glass better than he loved any living woman. He held his own opinions strongly, and if any one differed with him or sought to set him right, he would turn his back upon him in silence, for he scorned argument, declaring that he left it to the lawyers and such knaves, since it was unworthy of gentlemen who wore swords and could point a pistol to wrangle like women.

Yet he had a pretty enough wit, and I heard tell that he had not always been so silent until the day that Betty Blake married her cousin, Sir Jasper Carew. Then he swore that since words had served him so ill, he would use them no longer; and those who heard him smiled, thinking that Lady Carew would not long enjoy her husband's company, for Rick Crosbie was accounted the straightest shot in the county.

But in this my uncle proved them wrong, since he loved the lady so greatly that he would not kill her husband so long as she lived, albeit he could not forgive himself because he had not thought to shoot Sir Jasper before his wedding And indeed I think it had been better if he had done as his friends swore that he would. since Sir Jasper was lean and bloodless and made but a sorry lover, for his ancestors had left him but little that a gentleman could take pride in, save the gout, which crippled his limbs and yet left his tongue a-wagging. Then Rick Crosbie would not have grown old before his time, but had married Sir Jasper's widow and made both himself and her happy.

But when the lady died, having borne a child to her husband, Sir Jasper did not grieve greatly for her, nor yet as another man would because the child was a girl and he had no son to be heir to his name and estates. But Sir Jasper was like no other man, and loved the girl as though she had been a boy. She was a comely wench enough, and was said to play sweetly upon the spinet. She was proud, too, as I learned later, and had more of her mother's than her father's spirit.

But in truth I thought little of women, and only remembered them at all when I wondered that my uncle would not kill Sir Jasper, albeit he hated him, because Betty Blake had loved him.

I told Rody Macnamara what was in my mind.

- "Why, 'tis a strange world," said he, "and 'tis folly to grieve after a dead woman, and yet I doubt that Rick Crosbie would be any the happier for putting Sir Jasper to sleep, seeing that he would bring them together again."
  - "Together?" I exclaimed.
  - "Aye, since they will lie in one grave."
- "He would rather lie there himself," I said, to keep Sir Jasper out of it."
- "Of that I have little doubt," he returned; "but for myself I had rather think of marrying

Betty Carew than of killing her father. 'Twould serve you better, since she has a noble fortune."

"The fortune would serve me well enough," I cried, "but a woman's face would tarnish the guineas."

"Not Betty Carew's," he made answer, laughing; "but when you need my services, I am ready."

"I shall remember," I said, smiling to think how little likely such a service should be required of him.

Seeing the gloom that deadened my uncle's face, I hated all women for the grief that one had caused him. Yet I knew little of them save such wenches as were the plaything of an hour, and, as often as not, loved a guinea better than a kiss and cared not at all whence came either. And that a man who was as straight a shot as ever lived and had never shirked a fence nor blinked at a muzzle should fret his heart because of a woman, filled me with wonder and a certain angry pity.

I did not think that had he loved a woman less he might have married and begotten an

heir in my place, and so I should have been cheated of his love, which was very dear to me. One night when I had helped him from the dinner table, he leaned upon me heavier than he was used.

- "Rick, boy," he said, "you are no lover of women nor of their company."
- "I confess, sir," I returned, "that I love the company of men better whether by night or day. I would not have one of them sour my claret."
- "Yet many a man has forgotten his wine for the sake of a woman's smile."
- "That may be so," I made answer, "yet the wine agrees with me well, and I find their talk wearisome."
- "'Tis a strange world," he went on, thoughtfully. "Yet when you are older, Rick, you may find that to pledge a woman will make the wine sweeter."
  - " I like it as it is."
  - "How old are you, boy?"
  - "Twenty-three years last Tuesday."
- "And I am sixty-three, and for more than thirty years a woman's voice and a woman's memory has soured my wine."

"It grieves me greatly, sir," I began, but he interrupted me with unwonted passion.

"Silence, boy!" he cried, leaning helplessly upon his stick. "How dare you grieve for such a thing? Have I shown you my heart that you should mock at it with pretence of pity?"

I strove to answer him, but he silenced me.

"Fool, fool!" he cried. "You shall yet learn. You are proud of your skill with the barkers and of your sword-play, and proud because your horse carries you well."

"I am proud of these things," I returned somewhat sullenly, for his contempt angered me.

"Aye, I doubt not that you are," he cried, shaking a warning finger at me; "but the time will come when you will wish to give up all these things, and for what?"

"Indeed, I cannot tell," I retorted.

"No, you cannot. Then I will tell you. You would give them all for a smile—a smile from a woman."

"I do not think that I shall," I answered confidently.

- "Aye, and be a craven in her presence."
- "I shall remember my name," I said hotly.
- "It is my own," he returned simply.
- "I shall do it no dishonour," I cried, for my anger was quickly cooled.
- "Your father gave it to you because he loved me, and knew that I was not like to marry. To him and to me you owe it that you keep the honour of our name untarnished."

I drew my sword from its sheath and kissed its bright blade.

"I swear to keep our honour as bright," I said; whereupon my uncle bent his head, for he was near half a foot taller than I, and kissed my cheek.

After that we spoke no more of women, but only of men and of their meetings.

As I have said, my uncle was a silent man, and more sparing of words than of guineas. Yet of one thing he would always talk if the occasion arose, and chiefly when the wine tightened his belt and loosened his tongue. Twenty years before, when I was but a child, Rick Crosbie had met old Amby Bodkin in the Friar's Field, and had winged him cleverly. But Amby

Bodkin had left a ball in my uncle's hip, so that he never walked straight afterwards; and of his lameness and of the wound that caused it he was proud, because so straight a shot as Amby had erred after that he had sworn to leave a ball in the curtain of Rick Crosbie's side. And young Amby would laugh, swearing that my uncle was right, for, so he had heard his father declare, and that Rick Crosbie had made him a perjurer. And this always pleased my uncle greatly, so he came near to loving young Amby as much as he loved me.

Now it happened one night that we stayed late with Sir Roger Blake, who was a kinsman of the Lady Carew, and much wine was drunk before morning. At first my uncle was displeased that Luke Dillon, who was Sir Jasper's friend and a man of ill temper, should sit before him; but in a little while he seemed to forget it, and told his story of his meeting with Amby Bodkin, as he was used.

But when they rose to their feet and drank to my uncle, Luke Dillon alone remained in his seat, with the full glass before him.

Rick Crosbie's face grew dark with anger.

- "The story is not to your liking?" he said.
- "It pleases me well enough, save in one particular," the other returned.
  - "And that, sir?" cried my uncle.
- "I would swear that Amby Bodkin had kept his pledge if you had not shifted his ground."

At this my uncle bowed very calmly; then turning his back on Luke Dillon he called for his pistols.

Sir Roger would have them wait till the sun was up, but Rick Crosbie cried out that the candles gave good light enough to see an ugly face, and the length of the table sufficient between them.

- "I will wager a thousand pounds that you will never walk straight again," said my uncle.
- "I take your wager," said the other calmly; "'twill be a pretty gift for my bride."
  - "Your bride?"
  - "Aye, for Betty Carew."

My uncle's face paled, and I saw his hand tremble as he took the point-blanker.

Then Sir Roger lifted the wine to his lips for a signal, and my uncle fell forward with a ball in his lung; but Luke Dillon still stood upright, albeit his right arm hung limp by his side, for Rick Crosbie had lost his wager and had only winged his enemy.

I sprang forward and lifted my uncle's head. He smiled at me and tried to speak. I put my ear to his lips, which were wet with blood.

"The wager, our honour," he gasped, "a debt of honour."

"It shall be paid," I whispered.

He smiled, but spoke no more.

So when I had laid my uncle in the churchyard of St. Bride, as near as might be to the Lady Carew, and had drunk to his memory with the friends that loved him, I must bethink me of how I might pay the wager and save his honour and my own. Now this was no easy matter, since my uncle cared little for the guineas so there was no lack of wine in his cellars, and this he owed as often as not to the kindness of his friends. So I was heir to little else save his name and his debt of honour.

The more I thought on the matter the more difficult did it seem to come to a resolve. It was in my mind to pay the wager and afterwards call Luke Dillon out and shoot him as

my uncle would have done, I make no doubt, had not the name of Betty Carew unnerved his hand, because she was Betty Blake's daughter. So I was in sore perplexity, seeing that, being a man of honour, I could not put Luke Dillon to sleep until I had paid him a thousand guineas.

When I told Rody Macnamara of the trouble that I was in he broke out laughing.

- "Why, Rick," he cried, "if a man will not help himself, he had better be a woman."
- "I have been used to a man's part," I returned.
- "Then play it now and you will pay Luke Dillon more than his wager—but it needs a bold heart."
- "I will answer for my heart," I said. "What shall I do?"
  - "Betty Carew is very beautiful," he went on.
  - "So I have heard tell."
  - "She has five thousand guineas."
- "She shall have six if Luke Dillon keeps his pledge."
- "She shall pay your wager if you be a man of spirit," he answered.

- "My wits are dull to-night, for I do not understand," I said.
- "By my soul, they are dull!" Rody cried out, setting down the wine impatiently; "and so you may thank your fortune that you have a friend to quicken them. If you will listen to me you shall pay your wager and be revenged on Luke Dillon, or lose your life."
  - "How can I do it?"
  - "You must carry off Betty Carew."
  - "Carry her off?"
- "Aye, carry her off and marry her before you are twenty-four hours older."
  - "I want no wife," I returned coldly.
  - "Yet, she is beautiful," he went on.
  - "I care nothing for her beauty."
- "But she has five thousand guineas, and I think Luke Dillon loves her and would marry her," he said, watching me narrowly.
- "By my soul, that he shall never do while I live!" I cried out; for now I saw how I could humble my enemy, even though I should pay for it with my life, since I knew enough of women to be sure that she would never wed the man who had failed to protect her; "yet I

know not what I shall do with a wife, nor how I shall woo her, seeing that I am but little used to drawing-rooms or the ways of women."

"What matters it, Rick?" he answered. "I would dare swear that Betty Carew has more thought for a stout heart and a straight shot than she has eye for a silk stocking. Listen, Rick, to-night she goes to my Lady Burke's rout."

"And Sir Jasper?" I exclaimed, for my heart was grown warm at the adventure.

"Lies sick of the gout. You shall meet her there after that I have whispered in her ear that you have been caught by her beauty."

"I have scarce looked upon her face," I broke out.

"So she will believe it the more readily," he went on. "When she leaves the rout, you shall ride behind her coach."

"But the rascal who drives her?" I asked, becoming better pleased with the enterprise.

"Shall be made drunk with wine," he replied.
"Rody Macnamara shall take his place—at
the Shepherd's Crossing I will cut the traces
and go no further. Then you must set her

before you on your horse and finish the business."

- "'Twill be little to my credit if I fail in a matter so well planned," I cried.
- "And if need be I may save your neck, since I shall swear that Betty Carew sat in front and carried you off," he said, smiling.
- "'Tis a brave scheme," I returned, "albeit I would that a woman had no part in it."
- "Have a care, Rick," he cried, "lest a woman bring you to her feet, and after that scorn you."

But at this I smiled, remembering my uncle's warning.

Now I could not deny that Betty Carew was as beautiful a woman as ever I had seen. She had great pride, too, for one so young, and youth in her eyes mocked at the world.

I bowed low before her, thinking as if in a dream how I should wed her before dawn. As I raised my eyes to her face, I noted the colour in her cheeks, and made no doubt that Rody had kept his promise to whisper in her ear that I loved her. This pleased me not over much, since I was pledged to marry her to have

revenge on Luke Dillon and to pay his wager, and not because I loved her; and I had little mind to play at wooing.

- "Mr. Rick Crosbie is not often seen at a woman's rout," she said.
- "Nor would he now, but for Miss Betty Carew," I returned.

She made me a courtesy, and albeit she smiled as if in mockery, I saw that she was not ill-pleased.

- "For which she should be greatly honoured, could she believe it," she replied.
- "Indeed, it is true," I said, thinking how soon I should prove it true.
- "'Tis a virtue in a woman to disbelieve what pleases her most; and so, sir, I think you have come hither for another purpose," she retorted.
- "By my honour that I have not," I said, but only because of Miss Betty Carew."
- "How can I prove it?" she asked, smiling again.
- "You shall have proof before daybreak," I answered, making her a bow and leaving her. As I did so I caught Rody Macnamara's eye, and quickly joined him.

"The rogue that drove her coach will sleep till morning," he whispered, "for he has near a dozen bottles of good wine under his belt. He is a sorry rascal to waste good liquor upon, yet he may die the happier for it."

- "Die!" I exclaimed.
- "Aye, since as like as not they will kill him when he wakes, because Luke Dillon has lost his bride."
  - "I would save the rogue," I said.
  - "And lose your bride."

To that I answered nothing, and indeed the fellow's life was of little worth.

"When Miss Betty Carew takes her leave, remain a while," he went on; "then ride slowly until you come to the Crooked Chimney; after that use your spurs until you overtake us. At the Shepherd's Crossing I will leave you, having no desire to witness your nuptials, nor to adventure my neck further in your service."

I wrung his hand, and whispered that I would do all that he had said. Then I waited, impatiently enough, until Miss Carew was wearied of the dance. At length I saw her kiss Lady Burke's cheek and pass out of the

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chamber. In a little while I, too, took my leave. In the hall I passed Mr. Luke Dillon. Seeing me he stopped suddenly and made me a low bow.

"When Mr. Rick Crosbie is at leisure——"he began.

"You shall not complain of my delay," I cried, passing on.

The sight of him fired my blood. wanted no wife, yet, I would have one to be revenged on him. He should have his guineas and the satisfaction due to a gentleman. I scarce thought if Betty Carew loved him, knowing little of women, and I know not if I cared since I was resolved to wed her. My sword was a serviceable one and not made for a dancer. When I had looked to the priming of my pistols I sprang into the saddle and took the road to the Shepherd's Crossing. Leaving the lights of Kilrea, the night seemed dark and the clouds heavy. I was at some pains to restrain my eagerness and keep a tight rein; yet I saw the wisdom of prudence, and so went leisurely until I was come to the crooked chimney. Then I used my spurs. Within half a mile of the Shepherd's Crossing I saw the lamp of a

coach before me, and had little doubt that it carried Miss Betty Carew. I rode faster and overtook it. The windows were shuttered, but a gleam from the lamp revealed the face of Rody Macnamara, wearing the coat and hat of the fellow that lay asleep at Kilrea.

- "Good luck to your wooing!" he said. "But I am tired of the business, seeing that I am half in love with her already, and these garments become me not at all."
  - "And the lady?" I asked.
- "How can I tell? I think she sleeps, but I know not for certain, since I am but a servant, and dare not speak with her save to answer that the night was dark. I would it was over and I a gentleman again. Do you wear a sword?"
  - "Aye, and pistols to boot."
- "'Tis well, since I had some thoughts of wedding her myself."
  - "You would betray me?" I exclaimed.
- "Not I, Rick, not for any woman living. But by my soul she is beautiful, and her voice the sweetest ever I heard, albeit it was to a servant that she spoke. But I could not answer her, in fear that she should know me."

Then he drew a knife, and bending over slashed at the traces.

"Good luck to your wooing!" he said; "for I have worn the halter long enough for a friend, and no woman at all. Good luck to you!" And he flung the reins from his hands and leaped into the darkness.

For a moment I knew not what to do. The coach had stopped, and I drew rein beside it. Before I could come to a resolve the window was thrown open and Betty Carew looked from it.

- "What has happened?" she cried, gazing at me in amazement.
- "Madam," I answered, "the harness is broke, and I cannot find your servant anywhere."
- "The rascal!" she returned; "he has drunk Sir Phelim's wine."
  - "' Tis very likely," I answered.
- "And I am still far from home," she went on.
  - "A good ten miles," I made answer.
- "I know not what to do," she went on, seeming in much perplexity.
  - "There is but one way," I said.

- "And that?"
- "That you ride with me."

I could have sworn that she blushed.

- "I have never travelled so before," she objected.
  - "If you are afraid, madam-" I began.
- "I am afraid of nothing, not even of Mr. Rick Crosbie, albeit he wears a duelling sword in the ball-room," she retorted. "What would you have me do?"
- "Mount my horse and ride before me," I said; and my heart beat a little faster.

Without a word she took her jewels from the coach, and putting her foot on mine leaped upon the horse's wither.

- "You are not afraid?" I repeated.
- "I fear nothing," she answered haughtily.

So I held her in my arms and rode quickly towards my home at Kilmorna. When I set her down the light from the windows dazzled her eyes, so that she knew not where she was until she stood in the hall. Then she turned to me in perplexity and in some anger.

"Whither have you brought me, sir?" she asked.

"To Kilmorna."

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- "It is not my home, and my father waits for me."
- "It shall be your home, and Sir Jasper must wait."
  - "This night?"
  - "Aye, and for many nights," I made answer.

Despite her brave words I saw a shadow pass over her face.

"I do not understand," she said coldly.

I went to the table and poured out wine. Then holding the glass in my hand I bowed low before her.

- "Madam, I drink to Miss Betty Carew."
- "I have nothing against the toast," she replied, but less haughtily.
  - "The mistress of Kilmorna."
- "You are pleased to jest, since Betty Carew is mistress of her own heart only."
- "Is she mistress of that and Mr. Luke Dillon alive?" I said, hazarding the question.
- "She shall be no slave," she said, with her eyes flashing.
- "So she is fitter to be mistress of Kilmorna," I returned.

- "I do not understand," she repeated.
- "I have sworn to marry Betty Carew."
- "For love of her?"

Now at that moment I would have given all the world to have said yes to her question, but I grew confused, so that I could not answer her.

Seeing my hesitation, she grew cold again.

- "Sir, I thank you for your hospitality," she said, and her fingers played with her jewels. "And I am in such a case that I must accept it. To-morrow my father also will thank you, though indeed I thought that I was returning home."
  - "You have come home," I returned.
- "It pleases you still to jest; to-morrow I will bid my father thank you."
- "There is no need, since you will not return," I cried.

I could not tell if she feared me or not. She looked at me sharply, and I felt her eyes pierce me.

- "Why have you brought me hither?" she asked.
- "Since I have sworn to marry you," I made answer.

Now for the life of me I could not lie to her, and yet I saw trouble in confessing.

- "Madam," I said, "there is a priest handy. Pray bid me call him."
  - "You have not answered me," she retorted.
- "Why have you carried me off?"
  - "Because I would marry you."
  - "For my fortune?"

The scorn in her words stung me.

- "It may be so, but I have sworn to marry you."
- "Then you shall not," she burst out passionately. "I am no slave to marry a coward."
- "Who has risked his life for you," I returned.
  - "And will lose it. You know the penalty?"
  - "Aye, I know it well; it is death."
  - "Then you shall die," she repeated.
  - "I shall marry you," I returned.
- "And make me a widow?" she asked, with a faint smile as though the jest pleased her.
  - "And make you a wife."
  - "For the sake of my fortune?" she persisted. But I would not answer her.
  - "If you be a man of honour you will answer

me," she went on passionately. "You would have no wife, but only my fortune?"

- "I am a poor wooer," I muttered.
- "That I know well. Why do you desire my fortune?"
- "To pay a debt of honour," I answered, without meeting her eyes.
  - "By dishonouring me?"
  - "'Tis no dishonour to give you my name."
- "In return for my fortune. But, sir, I am better pleased with my own name, and so I will never marry you."

Then she took the wine which I had poured out for her and cast it upon the floor.

I felt my cheeks burn at the insult.

"Madam," I said, "I am a man of honour, and the wine was good. You are my guest."

Her face flushed a little.

- "Rather your prisoner."
- "You are mistress of the house," I broke in.
- "Then I would be relieved of your presence."

I made her a bow. Then summoning a maid-servant I bade her show Miss Carew to her chamber and wait upon her. She made me a little courtesy and followed the servant.

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At the door she paused a moment as if in hesitation, and the jewels glittered on her neck. Then she left me without a word.

I was now in greater perplexity than before, seeing that if the lady still refused to wed me I was in danger to be tried for my life; and if she bore witness against me, as I had little doubt that she would, I had no hope to save it. Thinking so on the matter I fell asleep. When I woke it was well past noon, and before the day was done I judged that Sir Jasper's friends would have tracked his daughter to Kilmorna. I had little time to lose if I would save my life.

So when I had refreshed myself with a deep draught of buttered claret, I bade a servant beg Miss Carew for the honour of her company. For a long time I waited, and was begun to fear lest she would refuse to meet me when I heard the rustle of silk, and Betty Carew entered the chamber. I think she was more beautiful than I had seen her by the light of the candles, albeit she no longer wore her jewels.

She made me a low courtesy, mocking me.

"I hope that my guest is rested," I said, bowing.

- "Your prisoner is no longer weary," she returned.
- "My wife will forgive when my guest is pitiless. The priest grows impatient," I went on, watching her.

The colour flickered in her cheek.

- "Let him pray for your soul then," she cried.
  - "Am I so near death?" I asked.
- "Nearer to death than to marriage," she retorted.
  - "Unless you will save me."
- "How can I save you and not perjure my soul?"
- "They will not ask a wife to swear her husband's life away."
  - "I will not marry you!" she broke out.
  - "Then I care nothing for my life."
- "Because you will lose my fortune?" she asked smiling.
- "Because I love you and would marry you," I cried; and indeed it was true, for her spirit and beauty had caught my heart.

The blood flamed in her cheeks. She turned her head from me, gazing out at the woods.

- "I will save you," she said at last.
- "And be my wife?"
- "No, but I will pay the wager," she went on.
  - "And marry Luke Dillon?" I said.
  - "It may be so," she returned a little wearily.
- "He shall not marry you!" I cried out, seizing her hand. "I will kill him first."
- "And your uncle's wager, your debt of honour?" she asked.
- "I care not, only to marry you," and I caught her to my heart.

But she freed herself, and looked thoughtfully from the window to where the road climbed the hill to Kilrea.

- "Bid me summon the priest," I whispered.
- She turned and looked into my eyes.
- "Do you indeed love me and not the guineas?"
- "Better than my life, since I will not live without you."
- "What do you see yonder?" she asked, pointing to the window.

I looked out. A troop of horse was slowly approaching the house.

- "They would arrest me!" I cried; "and see Luke Dillon is at their head."
- "Summon the priest," she whispered very softly.

They beat upon the door with their swordhilts, so that I could scarce hear the words of the priest, but my lady's voice sounded clear above the din. When he had finished, she turned to me.

- "My husband!" she said.
- "My wife!" I cried, kissing her cheek.

Then she caught my hand and drew me into the hall. A couple of servants stood waiting in perplexity, not knowing what to do.

"Bid them open the door," she said, still holding my hand.

I did as she bade, and Luke Dillon sprang into the hall.

"There he stands, seize him, Mr. Sheriff!" he cried to the officer.

I laid my hand on my sword, but Betty caught it.

"Let no sword be drawn to-day," she said. Then turning to the Sheriff she made him a courtesy.

"You have come opportunely to wish us joy, me and my husband."

The Sheriff looked perplexed, as though he knew not whom to obey.

"He has bewitched you," broke out Luke Dillon, his lips quivering with anger; "but he shall hang for it. Mr. Sheriff, bid your men seize him."

But my wife turned her back upon him, and addressing the officer, said:

"Sir, I bid you welcome to my new home. I pray you to drink to me and to my husband, Mr. Rick Crosbie, who later will answer this gentleman as he deserves."

On this Luke Dillon turned on his heel and went out. The Sheriff looked after him a moment angrily; then he made us a bow.

"Madam, and you too, sir," he exclaimed, "I pray you to forgive me. The fault was not mine, if I erred."

"Drink, sir, drink," I cried, "to the bravest and most beautiful lady in the kingdom."

He took the wine, and bowing low drank it. Then he set down the glass. "I pray you to forgive me, sir," he said again; "but Mr. Luke Dillon shall answer for it."

"I dare swear that he needs no answer, but if he does, then my husband shall answer him;" and she laid her head upon my breast.

## CHAPTER VII

#### LOVE IN A MASK

Showing how Betty Barton played Belinda to some purpose

I confess that I never laid my man with less goodwill than when I hipped Dick Devereux in the Nine Acres. In truth, it would have pleased me better to have winged him, so that I might the sooner enjoy his company, since I loved him as dear as my honour. And so I would have done, had not they cried out against me so greatly for my meeting with Nat Fitzgerald, swearing that I had done ill to put a ball in his shoulder, when I might have found his heart, because he was the son of my father's enemy.

And Dick Devereux, when I made light of the matter, became angry and swore in his cups that I had forgotten my father's memory and had brought dishonour on his pistols.

So I must needs call him out to prove that he lied. And albeit I was proud that he would never walk straight again, yet it grieved me to lose his company over the wine while he was mending, for he had a pretty wit, and his voice was as sweet as ever I heard.

Thus it was that when I had seen him carried to bed I left him to the leech and went to the Angel tavern, where I might find in buttered claret a remedy for my sorrow or a friend to share it with me, for I had no mind to drink alone.

At the Angel I found Peter Burrow, dressed gaily as if for a wedding.

- "'Twas a straight shot," said he. "I never saw a straighter. I'll warrant he has little blood in him this minute."
- "I confess that his voice is weak," I returned.
- "Let him say his prayers then, for I think you'll be going to his funeral."
- "I had rather go to your wedding," I retorted, with a glance at his dress.

- "Why then," he cried, laughing, "so you may, but I must fight the town first."
- "You'd be little good to a lady afterwards," I made answer.
  - "You have no love for women?" he asked.
- "I confess that I love men better," I returned. "Who is the lady?"
- "Who but Betty Barton, and the whole town is mad for her."
  - "'Twill be no easy matter to wed her."
  - "Unless you help me."
- "You may swear that I will," for the adventure pleased me. "Tell me what shall I do."

He drew me aside and spoke in a whisper, with a great appearance of mystery.

- "To-night she plays Belinda in the 'Victory of Love.'"
  - "'Tis a good name for a play," I said.
- "After the play she sups with me," he went on.
- "What, alone?" I cried; "then Love has won his victory."
- "No, no," he exclaimed impatiently "else I had no need of your services."

- "Would you woo her by deputy?" I asked, smiling at his heat.
- "By my soul that I would not," he broke out; "but she has with her a kinswoman, as ugly as she is beautiful, and as vain as, as——"
  - "As suitor," I said.
- "I do not quarrel with the word," he retorted, "and yet I have no reason to be confident, seeing that all the world desires her, and she has given me little to set my hopes surely upon."
- "I know little of women," I answered, "yet I dare swear that a stout heart and a ready sword will win them quicker than a supple knee or a glib tongue. You would carry her off?"
- "Aye, that I would, though I lose my head for it, could I but find the occasion," he cried.
- "'Twould be doing you wrong to doubt it," I returned. "For a man of wit and spirit the occasion will readily be made."
  - "And yet I fear-" he began.
- "'Tis no word for a lover," I said impatiently.
- "Nay, hear me out," he exclaimed. "'Tis no man that I fear, but her kinswoman, since I have kissed her hand."

"Then make amends by kissing her lips," I returned.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You do not understand," he cried, as though I had wronged him.

"My understanding is at your service, if you but humour it," I made answer.

He put his lips to my ear.

"Mrs. Fortescue thinks that I love her and not Betty at all," he whispered. "Look you here, Pierce Butler, you are a pretty fellow enough, and so you can help me in the matter."

"How shall I help you, knowing little of women?" I asked,

"Kiss her fingers as though you languished, cover your eyes with your hand and swear that you are dazzled by her beauty, vow that the rose was never half so fair as her brow, and that the bloom of the poppy is on her cheeks. Let your imagination run riot in doing her courtesies."

"If Betty Barton be as fair as they say, 'twill be no tax on my imagination," I replied.

"Betty Barton!" he exclaimed; "why, I

spoke of Mrs. Fortescue. Pierce, you are pledged to help me."

"Aye, so I will, with my sword, but I want no wife."

He looked at me keenly.

- "'Tis well that you do not," he said, "for I had begun to fear."
  - "What?" I asked, smiling.
- "It matters not since you have no mind to marry. But speak the lady fair, so that she forget me for the time and I find Betty's ear. When I seek Betty, 'tis oftener Mrs. Fortescue that welcomes me. Come, it is time for the play; when it is done I will present you."

Now it is true that I thought little of women, and showed them no more courtesy than an honourable gentleman was bound to do who would choose the greensward with a pistol in front of him rather than the boudoir carpet and a lady's face. Yet I confess that Peter Burrow's words whetted my curiosity, albeit I had no thought to do other than help him if I might. I could not be ignorant that Betty Barton had caught the town by her beauty, and

still more by her wit and virtue, since the most rakehelly of the bucks whispered no word against her. And that she had spirit too I could not doubt, since she had put a ball in Buck Whaley's shoulder, when he would have carried her off, and so he lost a thousand guineas and near all the blood that was in his body. Yet he, when he could find his breath, swore that he was rightly served, since Betty Barton was the most beautiful and most virtuous lady in the kingdom.

And, in truth, I could not deny that those who praised Betty Barton's beauty had reason; and yet it was not her beauty, albeit she was fair enough, that pleased me so much as her spirit and the elegance of her figure, for I dare swear that none ever yet played the part of Belinda in the "Victory of Love" one half so bravely nor with so much tenderness. I felt my blood grow hot when the rascal Belamor kissed her hand, playing at love with her, while she sighed her passion into his ear. I forgot where I was and the company about me, watching her.

"Confess, Pierce, that you have never yet

seen a woman half so beautiful," Peter Burrow whispered.

I could have struck him in the face for reminding me of his presence, and for anger because it was only a play that had moved me so—I, that was used to deeds, and had ever scorned playing with love as with the sword.

"Aye, she is fair enough by candle light," I returned. "Yet I dare swear that in the sunlight there are many ladies in this city to outshine her."

I cannot tell if she heard my words, for as I spoke she turned her eye full upon me. "If love be false," she cried out, and her voice quivered with passion, "I would not live another day, but die believing, not bereft."

My eyes fell before hers, and the blood burned in my temples.

"Let her think me a churl if she will," I said to myself. "What matters it since I do but play the lackey to her lover?"

Yet it pleased me but little to think that, albeit I wore a sword, yet a woman should find me lacking in courtesy. So I thought no more of the play, but only of Betty Barton, and

cursed my folly because I was sworn to help my friend to win her.

The shouts of the company roused me, so that I knew the play was already finished. Peter Burrow caught me by the arm.

"Awake, Sir Coldheart!" he cried. "Tonight you will meet the Goddess of Love."

Like one in a dream I rose and followed him, remembering nothing until I bowed low before Miss Betty Barton, the lower that I might hide the shame in my eyes.

She was no longer the proud and passionate Belinda, albeit wit sparkled in her eyes and humour curved her cheek.

"Have I pleased my lords?" she asked, smiling, and making us a courtesy.

Peter Burrow caught her hand to his lips.

- "You have captured a nation!" he cried; "Belinda is Queen of the City."
- "'Tis but a ghostly victory," she retorted, "seeing that Belinda is dead."
- "She is come to life again in Betty Barton," said Burrow, while I remained silent, caring no longer for Belinda.

- "Mr. Butler does not believe it," she cried, since he cares nothing for Belinda."
  - "Belinda is dead indeed," I made answer.
- "Dead, sir!" she repeated with some anger, while Peter Burrow made as though he would stand between us.
- "Aye, since Betty Barton is alive, who will think on Belinda?"

She looked at me doubtfully a moment, then a smile caressed her features. She swept me a courtesy.

- "I am no artist, sir," she said, "since it is more agreeable to me that Betty Barton be loved than Belinda praised."
- "Then you should be happy indeed," cried Peter Burrow, "since all the town loves you. Of that you cannot be ignorant."

The colour rose in her cheeks.

"They use me as a reason for their quarrels," she said, with some bitterness; "'tis not for love of me but for their own vanity that they fight in my name. You will sup with us?" and she turned to me.

I bowed, murmuring my thanks for so great an honour.

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"'Tis no honour since Belinda is dead," she answered, smiling. Then she led the way to her coach. So we went with her to the Eight Bells tavern, where she was lodged. Then she begged us to pardon her for leaving us a while.

"I make but a sorry hostess," she said, "but my aunt will bid you welcome." Then she left us.

"You will play your part?" whispered Peter.

"Aye, I will play my part," I answered ungraciously enough, for indeed I had now less stomach for the business than before, yet, having given my pledge, I might not draw back.

"Mrs. Fortescue!" he exclaimed.

I turned and bowed low to a lady who stood upon the threshold. She was scarce taller than Miss Barton and not near so slender. Her face doubtless had once been handsome, yet now it was wrinkled, and what I could see of it for the patches, was very yellow. Her hands indeed were beautiful, being not unlike those of her kinswoman, albeit she wore a great number of rings on her fingers. She was very

richly dressed, being in this matter also unlike Miss Barton, who, save when on the stage, was wont to dress very simply, as though she cared little for jewels.

Remembering my promise, I knelt and kissed her hand. She tapped my cheek playfully with a large fan that she carried.

- "'Tis a pretty courtesy," she said, "yet I think it were well out of fashion."
  - "Why so, madam?" I asked.
- "Since it is the way to a lady's heart," she returned, looking at me coyly from behind her fan.
- "I thought that the lips were nearer," I went on.
- "'Tis the heart that gives the hand, though the lips may promise. Which would you have?"
  - "The heart, since the lips may be forsworn."

All the while, Peter Burrow waited impatiently, nor cared to conceal how ill pleased he was that Betty Barton should delay so long. And this, I think, pleased Mrs. Fortescue well, since he made no pretence of liking her company.

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- "Mr. Burrow is impatient for supper," she said at last; "let us not delay any longer," and she put her hand on my arm.
  - "And Miss Barton?" Burrow cried out.
- "Ah, I had forgotten. Pray forgive me and Mr. Butler too, since his pretty speeches have made me to forget that I am her messenger."
  - "Her messenger?" Peter exclaimed.

She made him a courtesy, and I swear that she was as graceful as many a younger woman.

"Even so, sir," she said coldly. "Miss Barton begs that you will pardon her, but she is weary and needs rest. Later she herself will beg your forgiveness."

Looking at Peter Burrow's face I could scarce refrain from laughter. For a moment he did not speak for anger and amazement at the trick that Miss Barton had played upon him.

Then he turned to Mrs. Fortescue and made her a low bow.

"Madam," he said, "I thank you for your courtesy, but indeed I fear that to-night I should make a dull companion. My friend is a man of parts, and I do not doubt has wit enough to season your supper."

"I make no doubt that he has," the lady answered with dignity. "Mr. Butler, the supper waits."

Now albeit I had gone into the matter unwillingly enough, yet now I could not but see in it a prospect of some diversion. I was as ignorant as Peter Burrow appeared to be, and no less surprised, as to why Miss Barton had played such a trick upon her lover.

Yet as for Mrs. Fortescue I could not but confess that I had never a wittier or more agreeable companion to my supper, so that I went near forgetting her yellow face and her wrinkles, listening to her voice, which was singularly sweet.

At length she rose to leave me, begging me to forgive her, and in token thereof to remain and drink my wine at leisure.

- "I am but a poor hostess," she said.
- "I never knew one better," I cried.
- "So you forgive me that I am not Betty Barton."
  - "There is no reason to forgive you."
- "Yet they say that she is beautiful," she went on, watching me.

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"I care not what they say, but I will swear that she is good and has spirit."

She turned her eyes from me, so that I feared that maybe I had offended her by speaking in praise of her kinswoman.

- "I think she has spirit," she returned very gently, "and I hope that she is good."
  - "I would wager my life upon it," I cried.
- "Good-night," she said, giving me her hand. So I knelt and kissed it. She made me a courtesy and left me. Then I went back to my wine.
- "Her heart is young and makes a light footstep, albeit her face betrays her," I muttered, thinking that Peter Burrow might have dealt more tenderly with her and forgiven her because Betty Barton had deceived him. The wine was generous and warmed my heart to her.

I was thinking of taking my leave when the door opened very gently and Betty Barton herself came in.

I rose from my seat and bowed coldly to her, for I had not yet forgiven her for slighting us, since I made no doubt that her weariness was feigned.

- "Have you supped well, sir?" she asked, smiling.
- "Aye, well indeed," I returned, "and never in better company."
- "My aunt thinks well of you and praises your wit."
  - "For that I thank you," I made answer.
- "And for nothing else?" she cried, and her eyes mocked me.
  - "For Mrs. Fortescue's company."
- "I fear that my aunt's heart is in danger," she went on.
  - "I swear that I went near losing my own.'
- "She thinks you are a man of spirit," she said, watching me.

I bowed in silence.

- "Who would protect a lady's honour and not boast of it after," she continued; and I could not tell if she mocked me.
- "I dare answer for that," I cried. "Does Miss Barton doubt me?"
- "That she does not, since Mrs. Fortescue swears to it, and years have given her wisdom."
  - " I did not count her years," I said coldly.
  - "Yet you are not blind."

"I think her wit dazzled me," I returned.

She came closer to me.

"You kissed my aunt's hand, will you not kiss mine?" she asked, and the mockery was gone from her voice.

So I raised her hand to my lips and kissed it. The blood filled her cheeks, and she looked down at my feet.

- "She is a foolish woman as I am," she murmured.
  - "I thought her very wise."
- "No woman that has a heart is wise," she made answer.
  - "But if she lose it?"
- "Then she only increases her sadness, not her wisdom. Will you drink to a toast."

She poured out the wine with delicate fingers. Then I raised the glass and waited for her toast. She seemed to have some difficulty in finding words.

- "Drink," she cried at last, "to the woman who chooses folly rather than wisdom that she may win the desire of her heart."
- "Who is the woman?" I asked, watching her in some surprise.

- "The woman is- Betty Barton."
- "May she win the desire of her heart!" I said coldly, and drank the wine as though it were vinegar, for now I had little doubt that she loved Peter Burrow, and had feigned weariness the better to win him.

Before I could regain my wits she had gone and left me alone.

"Whether she be Belinda or Betty Barton," I cried, "I will see her no more."

Then I bethought me of how I had promised Peter Burrow to help him in the matter if he desired it.

"He needs no help of mine," I muttered, "seeing that he has won her;" and in my heart I could not wish him joy.

A se'nnight after that I had supped with Mrs. Fortescue Peter Burrow burst in upon me. His face betrayed the liveliest gratification.

- "Wish me joy, Pierce," he cried, "for to-day there is no man happier in the kingdom."
- "I am not like to rival you in happiness," I said. "Who has left you a fortune?"
  - "Fortune!" he exclaimed scornfully, "what

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fortune would you set against the Queen of Love, who shall be my wife this day?"

- "Miss Betty Barton!" I cried.
- "Aye, who else?"
- "I thought that she loved you," I said, remembering her toast.

He smiled complacently as though it were folly to doubt it.

- "Listen, Pierce," he went on. "I need your help."
- "I do not understand, since she loves you," I made answer.
  - "She would marry a man of spirit."
  - "I do not doubt it."
  - "Who would risk his life to possess her."
- "It is the way of women," I retorted. "What would you have me do?"
- "In the morning she goes to Clapook to visit the Lady Blake. She will go instead to the Church of St. Bride."
- "You will carry her off to prove you a man of spirit?" I asked smiling.
  - "'Twill please her better."
  - "What would you have me do?"
  - " Meet us at noon by the Church of St. Bride

with sword and pistols, lest there be trouble, since I know no man in the city save Pierce Butler that would not kill me to have her."

So with a sad heart I promised to do as he wished, albeit it would have pleased me better to have called him out and laid him on the Down of Clapook.

"Will Mrs. Fortescue be at the wedding?" I asked.

His face grew dark with anger.

- "I never came so near to hating a woman," he cried. "I would that she were a man."
- "I thought she had wit and discretion," I said, smiling at his anger.
- "Then marry her, Pierce, since you think so highly of her virtues."
  - "I will think on the matter," I returned.

The next day I kept my pledge, and by noon stood waiting at the Church of St. Bride. The sacristan eyed me narrowly. He was an old man, and had dug many graves; but weddings pleased him better, since they brought him more guineas, especially if the bridegroom were young and his blood warm for his wedding.

"'Tis a most noble gentleman," said he.

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- "There is no doubt about it," I returned.
- "And a most beautiful lady."

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"The lady is accounted beautiful," I made answer, turning my back upon him, for his avarice wearied me.

"I never knew a gentleman to be late for his wedding," he croaked; "see here they come."

The coach came rapidly to the gate. Beside it rode Peter Burrow, gaily dressed for his wedding. He swept off his hat to the company. Then he leaped to the ground, and flinging open the door, he handed the lady from the coach and led her to the gate where I stood.

She was heavily veiled, so that I could not see her face. But as I bowed low before me, she made me a courtesy. Then I followed them into the church.

"Unveil your face, sweetheart," Peter Burrow whispered when we stood before the altar. "I would have them see my bride's beauty."

She raised her hands dutifully and flung back the white veil, making him a courtesy as she did so.

"Mrs. Fortescue!" I cried out, for it was

she, and not Betty Barton at all. As for Peter Burrow, he looked bewildered as one that wakes slowly from an evil dream.

- "At your service, sir," the lady said, turning to me. "This gentleman has carried me hither against my will and would force me to marry him;" and she smiled as though she found much entertainment in the business.
- "Marry you!" cried Burrow, his face crimson with passion. "I would rather die."
- "'Tis the penalty for carrying off a lady," Mrs. Fortescue returned, smiling sweetly.
- "I am ready to pay the penalty," he burst out. "I have been tricked, and will pay for my dulness."
- "You will not marry me, having brought me hither to my dishonour?" the lady said again.
- "I will not marry you, I had rather die." And he turned his back upon her.

Upon this, the company broke out, murmuring against him because he had wronged the lady so greatly, for her meekness and gentleness had caught them, albeit she could boast of little beauty. She turned her eyes upon my face, as though she expected me to speak. Then I could be silent no longer.

"Madam," I said, taking her hand, "I am but a poor wooer, and there is little time to win your heart. If you will give me your hand, I will strive to win it."

Her eyes flashed a moment into mine. She made me a low courtesy.

"I will marry you, sir," she said humbly; "and in truth I think I have found a better husband and a more honourable gentleman than Mr. Peter Burrow."

So I stood beside Mrs. Fortescue and was made her husband, striving all the while to forget Betty Barton.

When we turned to leave the church I saw that Peter Burrow was no longer there. So when I had handed the lady into her coach I despatched a swift messenger to Currabeg that all things might be made ready to welcome my bride. Then I mounted my horse and rode slowly by the side of the coach.

In truth 'twas a sorry trick that fortune had played upon me, seeing that I had gone forth to see Peter Burrow marry Betty Barton and was returned home wedded myself to Mrs. Fortescue.

When we reached Currabeg I lifted my wife from the coach and bade her welcome to her new home. She thanked me in a whisper, but did not raise her veil.

"I will await you in the supper chamber," I said, leaving her with a maid-servant. Then I called for wine and took a deep draught of buttered claret, which in truth I stood much in need of, being married and having little love for my wife. And thinking, too, how Peter Burrow would wed Betty Barton and make the town laugh when they heard how I had been trapped.

While I thought on these things the door of the supper chamber was opened gently, and I rose to greet my wife.

- "Betty Barton!" I cried out in amaze, for it was she and not Mrs. Fortescue that stood on the threshold.
- "Not Betty Barton any longer," she said, coming nearer to me.
- "Who then?" I said, wondering if I dreamed.

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- "Betty Butler," she whispered, and her cheeks grew warm.
- "It is impossible," I cried, almost beside myself to think that she loved me and I had lost her, "as long as Mrs. Fortescue is alive."

She broke into laughter.

- "She is dead, as dead as Belinda; but Betty Barton is alive, and has this day wedded Pierce Butler."
- "I do not understand," I said, beginning to understand.
- "Since I played Mrs. Fortescue as I played Belinda but to better purpose, seeing that Mrs. Fortescue has won a loyal husband and Belinda has lost an unworthy lover."

### CHAPTER VIII

#### THE LADY OF THE BLACK FEATHER

Wherein is recounted how young Con Clery met the Lady, and what befell at Kilsallagh

How that I was the son of Grace Delaney and that it was Con Clery who had begotten me came about in no common fashion, seeing that my mother had a great fortune, and Con was but a broken gentleman with fewer guineas than he had friends to help him spend them. And albeit he loved a comely wench near as well as his bottle, yet he had little leisure for wooing, and no mind to kneel to a woman. So he was like enough to die and leave no heir to his name. And of Grace Delaney this same thing was said, since, albeit she had many to love her for her beauty and more for her guineas, she swore that no man had ever knelt to

her who was brave enough to rule her or handsome enough to be father of her children; and seeing that she was as proud as she was comely, men feared her scorn more than the blaze of a pistol, or the claret when it was sour. Hearing of these things, Con Clery laughed loud when he was heated with wine, and swore that he would wed her and humble her pride if he had a mind to.

- "'Twill be no easy matter," returned Thady MacDermot, thinking how not ten days before the lady had scorned him, declaring that she would marry a man and no craven.
- "So the wench will be worthier a man of spirit, who never feared the wine at night nor the pistols in the morning."
- "Her eyes are like steel when she is scornful," said Thady.
- "By my soul I love her the better for it. The steel was ever a friend of Con Clery."
- "Aye, it made a man of you before your time."
  - "A man!" said Con wondering.
  - "When Roger Burke let the light into your

father. He was a full-blooded man, and fell with a jest that he needed blood-letting."

"'Twas the rum-shrub that unnerved him, Thady. He had been alive this day if he had not fallen foul of the claret. And Roger found him in his cups, and careless of swordplay."

"Roger was a good man," said Thady.

Con looked at him, half in anger.

"If he came into the world crying, he went out of it laughing, Thady; and I am his son."

With that he rose to his feet and held the wine to his lips. Then he set down the cup empty.

"Till my wedding day, wine and I shall be strangers."

Thady looked at the wine.

"'Twill be a long time to go thirsty, I'm thinking," he said, for he loved wine greatly.

"There is good wine at Kilsallagh," Con returned, "and I think I'll soon be drinking it."

"Grace Delaney's husband will have little complaint of the wine."

"So he should make a good lover though his blood were cold," said Con. Then he fell into a moment's thought, while the other watched him secretly, and with no love in his eye.

- "To-morrow the hounds meet at the Shepherd's Crossing," he went on as though he spoke his thought to himself.
  - "Aye, 'tis true enough," returned Thady.
- "'Tis like that I find Grace Delaney at the meeting."
- "I dare swear you will, and be a thirsty man when the fox is dead, and longer if you keep your pledge."
  - "The wine of Kilsallagh is good."
- "Aye, none better, but the key of the cellar hangs from Grace Delaney's girdle."
- "You shall drink the wine of Kilsallagh at my wedding," said Con.
  - "'Tis a long time off."
- "Not twenty-four hours if I am my father's son," cried Con; "you wooed her yourself, Thady."
- "I'm not like to forget it," Thady made answer, "nor the manner of her speech, since there was little pleasing in it."
  - "She shall learn gracious ways"

"She has need of a teacher," Thady retorted.

"See," said Con, "the day breaks. Will you hunt the fox to-day?"

"Not I in faith, for I have looked at the lady's face once too often. Good luck to your wooing!" And with that he turned his back on the wine and went out.

So Con dressed himself gaily as if for his wedding, and with a smile on his face rode down through the Valley of the Pines to the Shepherd's Crossing.

'Twas a brave day's hunting, and through it all Con and the lady whom he was sworn to wed rode together. But she never looked at him save in secret wondering, why he kept near to her this day—he who had shown her scant courtesy in the field nor cared to tread a measure with her, albeit she was as fair a woman as any in the kingdom. And Con wore a smile on his face as though he knew what was in her mind and was pleased by it. The sun was low when the hounds were called off, and Con it was who hung the brush in the lady's saddle bow. At first she was for refusing it, since

indeed she was not over well pleased that he should have outstripped her in the chase.

"'Tis a poor man's gift for your wedding day," said he.

At that she laughed out.

"I'm not like to marry," she cried, "seeing that Roger Blake was put to sleep many a day ago, and the gout cripples old Sir Phelim Burke so greatly that he would make but a sorry lover; and in these days I find none else that a woman could be proud to love."

"I would have you make trial, madam," said he.

"Of whom, sir?" she asked, and her eyes flashed.

"You would find my father's son no craven," he returned, looking into her face. 'Twas then that he saw the woman in her, for he could have sworn that her lips were grown tender.

But she made no answer, and so they rode on together in silence. When they reached the Hunter's Gap suddenly the lady drew rein, and pointing away to the right whence came the sound of waters rushing tumultuously, she exclaimed:

- "What is that yonder?"
- "The Devil's Dyke," he made answer, wondering at her meaning.
- "Aye, I know it well," she went on. "There were but three that crossed it alive, and two of them are now dead and Sir Phelim will never sit in the saddle again. I would that I had lived when they were young. Then it may be I had found a man to rule me and make me proud that I was a woman."

At this Con's heart leapt in him.

- "'Tis Con Clery will cross the Devil's Dyke if he finds his wife on the other side."
  - "Whom would you have?" she asked softly.
  - "Whom but Grace Delaney?"
- "If you die you shall have masses said for your soul," said she.
- "Let my soul wait till I die, for I am in good humour with life, and 'tis ill waiting for a wife's kisses."

At this she gave him her hand.

"I make no doubt that you are a brave man," she said, "and you shall have what you will—on the other side." Then she turned from him and rode away until she was come to the bridge,

crossing which she went down by the river to the Devil's Dyke and saw Con waiting.

'Twas a feat that needed a stout heart and no little skill, and he knew it. Moreover his horse was weary, and the odds against his crossing the dyke. He tightened his girths, measuring the leap, when his eye caught sight of Grace Delaney sitting motionless watching him. In a moment he sprang into the saddle, and setting his teeth hard he put spurs to his horse and rode forward. But on the edge of the dyke the horse swerved, trembling at the roar of the waters. Con forced him again, driving his spurs deep. With a cry of terror he sprang forward and plunged headlong into the water. But Con Clery, as if by a miracle, was cast upon the bank, standing upright on his feet before his bride. But his heart was sore at the loss of his beast, so that for a moment he scarce looked at the lady.

"'Twas a good friend that I have lost," he said. But the lady turned her head away and answered him nothing. Then his heart smote him, and he knelt and kissed her hand.

# THE LADY OF THE BLACK FEATHER

"What matters it," he cried, "since Con Clery has won the fairest lady in the kingdom?"

"And Grace Delaney the bravest man alive," she murmured. So they went back together through the Valley of the Pines, and that night were wedded, and Con drank to his wife in the wine of Kilsallagh, as he had sworn to do.

But Thady MacDermot would not come to Kilsallagh, albeit my father often begged his company, but if he met Con Clery would look away from him as if he found my father's face displeasing. And at this my father was grieved, because he loved Thady, and was puzzled too, since within a year of his own wedding Thady MacDermot found him a wife with no small fortune to back her comeliness. But when I was born all my father's friends and many that loved him little came to Kilsallagh to drink to my honour. Thady was not amongst them, and that too albeit the buttered claret flowed for nine days. So my father no longer counted him among his friends, and was not careful lest he should show what was in his mind.

Now it happened one night that Con supped with Martin D'Arcy to do honour to a pipe of

claret which was but newly come out of France. When the wine had heated them, there was much talk and not a little boasting. And my father, seeing Thady's eye fixed sourly upon him, fell into extravagance, seeking to anger him and declared that he had leaped the Devil's Dyke to win his bride, and how the lady had scorned Thady MacDermot because his heart was softer than his tongue. At this there was a great tumult, Thady crying out that it was false, and that to prove it he would himself ride across the Devil's Dyke, and after that meet Con Clery with the barkers and put him to sleep in the Friar's Field, while the wine gave Con the courage of a man.

And the company was mightily pleased by the adventure, and cried out: "To the Devil's Dyke! 'Twill be a brave man that will cross it." Then they called for their horses, and mounting, rode down the valley, with laughter and jest, for the wine was still frantic in their blood.

But Martin D'Arcy wore a still face, for the matter was little to his liking, seeing how ill Thady carried his liquor and his horse little more than a colt and but half broke at that. When they were come to the Gap, Con Clery turned and bowed low to Thady MacDermot.

"I will await you," said he, "on the same spot where Con Clery's wife awaited his kisses."

Rage choked the answer in Thady's throat. He lifted his whip as though he would strike the smile from Con's face; then it fell rudely on his horse's flank. The horse sprang forward.

- "To the Devil's Dyke!" cried Thady, leaving them behind.
- "Aye, to the Devil's Dyke!" they shouted after him.

But when they reached the Devil's Dyke there was no sign of Thady; and on the other side Con Clery waited until his head sank on his breast and the wine was cold in him. Then he wheeled his horse about and rode back by the way that he had come, feeling no joy in his victory, but remembering only that Thady and he would never again drink the buttered claret together.

When Thady's wife heard what was befallen her husband, she did not stay to weep, but went straight to Kilsallagh, albeit she was heavy with child, for she feared lest she should die with her curse on Con Clery unspoken. But he when he saw her raised his hand as though he would keep her off, and his face went pale as the moonlight. And she, seeing his weakness, laughed out in scorn:

- "You have the heart of a coward in you, Con Clery, for all your boasting?" she cried.
- "The heart of a coward!" he repeated, as though the thing were strange to him.
- "Aye, the heart of a coward, since you pale at a woman's face and turn your back on a man."
- "What would you have with me?" he asked, and his voice was gentle.
- "What but leave you my curse?" she broke out passionately.
- "'Tis a woman's sword," he said thoughtfully. She raised her right hand, fixing her eyes upon his face.
  - "Con Clery," she cried, "hear my curse."

He bent his head before her.

"May the wine go sour upon your stomach and poison your blood. May your friends desert you and those you love be found amongst your enemies. May you fear the night and tremble at the coming of dawn: May your strength wither before the Spring, and may your wife lie with another before you are dead. May your son be a craven and bring shame on your name: and may the child that I carry beneath my heart stand upon the ruins of Kilsallagh when your race has perished in rottenness."

Then she went out and left him. But Con sank into a seat as though he were smitten with a palsy, and so his wife found him.

After that my father took no more pleasure in the wine, nor did he hunt the fox nor drink any longer in the company of his friends; and my mother's face grew lean and white watching him. But when I was old enough to hold the reins or to handle the barkers he came to himself somewhat and the heaviness passed from his face, while he taught me such things as a gentleman has need of.

"He shall be no craven," he used to mutter, though my name die for it, he shall be no craven."

At times too, when I handled the barkers to his liking, his eyes would flash and he would cry out: "They are a man's best friends and will never fail him if he use them well. There was never a brave man yet but had enemies where he thought to have friends. Keep your eyes open, boy, and your pistols ready, and they shall swear that Con Clery lives when I am dead."

And I made oath to do as he said; but all the while my heart was sad because of the sorrow that was in my mother's face and never left it.

When I was but little past ten years of age my father was caught by a strange distemper, which the physician could not heal, albeit he was well skilled in blood-letting. So when he had taken much blood from the sick man, and still the fever did not abate, my father begged him to forbear and leave him what little he had to save his body from reproach when his friends carried him from Kilsallagh, which they did three days later, and marvelled at the paleness of his face.

And as they buried my father I saw them shake their heads, speaking of the curse and how soon it fell; but of their words I understood little until afterwards.

Then one of them catching sight of the black riband which my mother had fastened to the hilt of my sword, cried out:

- "'Tis no colour for a gentleman's sword."
- "My mother would have it so since my father is dead," I made answer, "but the blade is bright."
- "Aye, I make no doubt that it is," he returned, "but another colour would have pleased Con Clery better."
- "You're thinking of the red," I said; and my heart began to grow hot.
- "I confess that 'twas in my mind." And he broke into a laugh.

I scarce know what I should have done, so angry I was, had not Martin D'Arcy strode between us.

"Let him be," he cried, "for I pledge myself that he will not be slow with his sword or his barkers when the time comes, since he is his father's son. But to-day his heart is too full for quarrel, and so too is my own, since a good man is gone to sleep and one that was my friend."

When he said this he bent and kissed my

cheek as though he were a woman, so that I was nearer to tears than to anger.

It was but a little while after when I must needs tie the knot of black upon my sword-hilt again, since my mother had no heart to live now that Con Clery was dead. So when she had bidden me remember my father always and to be jealous of my honour, she had Con's sword taken from the wall and put into my hand. Seeing me wield it with little difficulty, for I was stout for my years, she smiled and soon fell into a sleep and never wakened.

So they carried her out of Kilsallagh and laid her by her husband. And when I had wept a little because the place had become suddenly lonely, my mother's cousin, Ulick de Burgh, took me away to Duhallow, declaring that an empty house was ill for a lad to grow up in. So I went away with him taking my father's pistols and sword, and left Kilsallagh to the rooks that built their nests in the trees about it.

Ulick de Burgh was a big man and one that walked heavily, albeit in his youth he had been a brave rider. Yet now old age and the bottle

made him slothful, and he rode only to give flavour to his wine. He was a great lover of peace, and he hated the sight of a woman. Thus it was that he died before his time, more like a child than a man, because he quarrelled with no one and his blood flowed slowly in his big body. So when the gout caught his heart he had no thought to fight it but only sighed twice and fell dead upon his back.

Then I left Duhallow, being twenty-three years of age and already weary of quiet, and returned to Kilsallagh, gladly throwing open the great door and filling the place with light. And those that were left of my father's friends, came and made merry, swearing, when the claret flowed, that Con Clery had come to life again.

But of Thady MacDermot's widow they could tell nothing, save that she had left the country and had taken her daughter with her, and that many a year ago, so that they had well-nigh forgotten her until my return had brought the curse to mind. And indeed I was in no mood to think on it, seeing that I had wearied of Duhallow and was rejoiced to

find so many friends to welcome me at Kilsallagh.

So I lived as a man of blood and spirit, and drank the buttered claret o' nights, as my father had been wont to do, blazing in the Friar's Field when my blood was cooler in the morning. And in those days I had little leisure to think on a woman nor the fairness of her face, being in truth ignorant of them save for what I had learned of them from Ulick de Burgh, and that was little to their credit, for slothful as he was become he would allow no woman near him, and so they buried him high up on Duhallow Hill, lest the sound of woman's voice disturb his rest.

It happened one day that we followed the hounds, and the fox went through the Hunter's Gap and by the Shepherd's Crossing. As we passed below the Valley of the Pines, Martin D'Arcy cried out to me:

"Con, the claret has left me scant of breath, but if you are your father's son a woman shall not carry off the brush," and he stretched out his whip across the horse's ears.

So I lifted my eyes and saw that it was

indeed a woman that rode in front of us, and that she was young I could not doubt, seeing that her limbs were supple and her body buxom as the willow. Now albeit I knew little of women, yet I confess that my heart grew hot at the sight of her, since she rode as straight as a man and the hands on the reins were firm.

I rode hard upon her horse's flanks seeking to outstrip her, because of Rody's warning, and striving to see if there was beauty in her face, but I could see naught but her chin for the heavy veil, and that she wore no adornment save a black feather in her hat. Then suddenly she turned in the saddle and looked at me. Her eyes were very bright, and I could have sworn that they mocked me. Then she looked no longer at me but straight in front.

Now I was accounted a good rider and was well mounted, and it vexed me sore to be outstripped by a woman. Yet do what I might I could not come level with her, and 'twas small comfort to me that no man, but only a woman, rode betwixt me and the hounds.

When he reached the Bracken Copse, the

fox doubled and made across Noman's Land towards the Friar's Field; but still the white horse and his rider followed, the black feather bending beneath the rush of the wind.

Close by the Well of the Three Sisters, the foremost hound caught the fox, and in an instant, before the huntsman could call them off, the lady sprang amongst them and, beating them apart, snatched their quarry from them. Then with a great appearance of calmness she fastened the brush to her saddle-bow, while Rory, the huntsman, looked on, his brows heavy with anger. When she had done this she sprang into the saddle again.

At this a great burst of cheering broke from the field, and Martin's voice was loudest, but as for me I sat dumb in the saddle watching the lady's face, and wishing that I could see more of it.

When there was silence again, she bowed her head low over the neck of her horse, and I could not tell if she mocked us or was pleased that we did not grudge her the victory. Then she turned her back on us and rode slowly away without a word. I saw her pause by the

Well that her horse might drink; then I followed the hounds again.

But I had no longer any joy in the chase, and at the Heron's Pool I drew rein and turning about rode slowly towards Kilsallagh. My mind was full of the strange lady and I wondered greatly whence she had come and who her father was. That he was a man of spirit I could not doubt, seeing how brave she was and that she had put the men to shame. So I went on, holding the reins idly, until I was come near the Valley of the Pines. Then raising my eyes suddenly I saw before me the white horse and the dark form of his rider, with the black feather against the sky. The lady sat motionless in the saddle and gazed straight before her. So scarce knowing what I would do, I rode up to her, and sweeping off my hat and making her a low bow, I begged to know how I might be of service to her.

"I thank you, sir," she replied, and the sweetness of her voice thrilled me, "and I own that your presence is agreeable to me, seeing that I have lost my way and would find it again."

"You are new to the country?" I asked.

"The sun has deceived me," she made answer, "so that I know not the south from the west. Why have you left the chase?"

"Indeed I cannot tell," I replied truly enough, "unless it be that I might be of service to a lady of so much spirit and beauty." And I bowed again.

At that she broke out laughing.

"What do you know of my beauty, sir," she exclaimed, "since you have never seen my face?"

"I would wager my honour that beautiful," I returned, and my heart grew hot.

"Then you think but lightly of your honour to set it against so poor a thing."

She seemed to hesitate a moment, then with a sudden gesture she lifted her hand and pushed back the veil. The blood flamed in her cheeks, and she looked at me half in shame. half in defiance. To save my life I could not have uttered a word.

"How does my poor beauty please you, sir?" she asked in mock humility.

- "I swear that I have never seen aught that pleased me so greatly," I made answer. "Tonight I sup with Martin D'Arcy. There every man shall toast the fairest lady in the kingdom, or meet me in the morning."
- "You do me too much honour, sir," she said again, mocking me.
- "In what name shall they drink to you?" I went on.
- "What name?" she repeatedly, musingly, "why, if they need a name, let them drink to the Lady of Vengeance," and the music was gone out of her voice.
- "Vengeance!" I exclaimed. "That they shall not, seeing that it has an ill sound and would sour their wine. Nay, rather they shall drink to the Lady of the Black Feather, for by such name shall they all know that it is to you they drink."
- "Be it so then," she answered, as though the matter wearied her; "but now I would find my way again." And she drew her veil again so that it covered her face.
  - "Whither would you go?"
  - "To Kilsallagh."

- "Kilsallagh!" I cried out in amazement.
- "Aye, to Kilsallagh."
- "Why would you go to Kilsallagh?" I asked.
  - "Since I have a mind to see it."
  - "'Tis a woman's reason," I said.
  - "So it best fits a woman," she returned.

So we rode on in silence until we came to Kilsallagh, I greatly wondering why she desired to see my father's home and being resolved that she should not know whose it was, until I had learned why she desired to see the place.

At the gate she drew rein and gazed at the house a few moments. Then she rode on with her head bent as though I had no place in her thoughts. When we had left Kilsallagh near two miles behind, she turned to me as though she was become suddenly aware of my presence.

"I thank you, sir, for your company and guidance," she said, and her voice was grave; "for the rest of my journey I would travel alone." And making me a bow she passed on and left me gazing after her with my hat in my hand and my eyes full of wonder. Then seeing

that there was naught else to be done I turned and rode back to Kilsallagh.

That night I supped with Martin D'Arcy, and when the buttered claret flowed, I bade the company fill again and drink to the Lady of the Black Feather. And this they did willingly enough, since the wine was generous and they had forgot their anger because a woman had left them behind. But Martin drank his claret slowly, as though the toast were not greatly to his liking. Then he turned to me.

- "Con," he cried, "if you are your father's son, a woman shall not take the brush from you again, save as a gift."
- "The white horse is very swift," I answered.
  "I never saw a swifter."

He bent his head until his lips were close to my ear.

- "The red mare is swifter," he said. "I wager a pipe of French wine upon it. To-morrow she shall be in your stables."
- "What," I cried out, "shall I win the brush upon a borrowed horse?"
- "Where is the shame if you win the horse to boot? Is the gift to your liking?"

"I could not wish for a better," I answered, giving him my hand.

So it happened that when I went hunting again I rode the swiftest horse in the country. I was in some fear lest the Lady of the Black Feather should not join in the chase, but with the first yelping of the hounds, I saw her riding bravely before me. A few moments and I was by her side; another, and the red mare had left the white horse behind. Looking over my left shoulder I saw the glitter of the whip raised in the air, and knew that the Lady of the Black Feather was ill at ease. But I had no fear, seeing that there was no fleeter horse between Kilsallagh and Duhallow than the red mare with the blood of Barbary in her veins.

So I rode through valleys and over hills until the Mountain of the White Virgin rose clear before me and the sun grew red in the west, but all the while the white horse hung upon the red mare's flanks. The blood was in my head because I strove with a woman, yet I had no pity albeit her courage filled me with wonder. Hard by the River of the Purple

Trout there arose a great yelping of hounds, and the Chase was done.

Scarce a dozen paces from me the lady drew rein. Her head was bent as though she were weary, and the white horse stretched out his neck and sniffed the air. My own throat was hot and dry, and I had no leisure for speech. So I took the fox's brush and laid it upon her saddle-bow. Like voices heard in a dream came the shouting of the huntsmen, and the heather was brown underfoot.

She smiled a little, and her teeth were whiter than a hound's.

- "Whom must I thank for the gift?" she asked, and her voice was broken.
- "Many another would Con Clery give if he might."
  - "Con Clery!" she echoed.
- "It is my name," I said, "since a brave man was my begetter."
  - "The Master of Kilsallagh!" she repeated.
- "The same," I returned, "to do you a service."

At that she lifted her head very proudly, and seizing the brush flung it at my feet.

"'Tis the name of an enemy," she cried out, "since I am Peggy MacDermot and you Con Clery, the son of my father's enemy."

For a moment the strangeness of the thing took my speech from me. Then, as she turned her horse's head to leave me, I caught the bridle rein.

- "Thady MacDermot and Con Clery were friends once," I said, "and now there is peace between them," remembering that they were both dead.
- "But not between us, nor ever will be till I have found vengeance, for the sake of my father and my mother." And her voice was weaker than anger.
- "Let there be peace between us," I began, but she would not hear.
- "There shall be no peace," she cried out, and lifted the whip as though she would strike me to the ground; but as she did so one rode between us, the flank of his horse pressing me backwardly.
- "Have no fear, Madam," he said, "for he is both craven and churl, despite his name."

"Dom Cassidy!" I exclaimed, choking with anger.

"At your service, sir," he returned, "when the lady has no further need of me."

At this I felt suddenly calm again.

- "I would have the lady choose the better man," said I.
- "So she has chosen," he returned with a grin.
- "A dead man makes a cold lover," I went on.
  - "Shall we blaze at fifteen paces?"
  - "I would have it twelve," he made answer.
  - "At daybreak in the Friar's Field."
  - "You shall find me no laggard," he replied.

Then he rode away, following the Lady of the Black Feather. When he had gone a dozen paces he turned in the saddle and cried out, "Con Clery is dead;" and I heard the sound of his laughter.

So I took the fox's brush from the ground and fastened it to the saddle-bow. Then I sprang upon the red mare, and without looking at the company or heeding their greetings I rode away through the Valley of the Pines,

until I was come to Currabeg. There I found Pierce Butler, who had forgot the chase because he was but newly wed to Betty Barton.

- "Was it a good run?" he asked.
- "I could not wish for a better," I returned.
- "Yet your face is pale," he said, eyeing me.
- "Since the blood is in my heart," I made answer. "Pierce, I have business in the morning."
- "I could have sworn it, and if your face speak truth you would kill him."
- "I confess 'twas in my mind, so that my face has not lied," I made answer, smiling, "albeit I shoot straighter at fifteen paces than at twelve. Yet Dom Cassidy must have his way."
- "He is no child with the barkers," said Pierce, "and since he is short of sight, twelve paces will be to his liking."
- "That pleases me well," I returned, "since I would take advantage of no man's infirmity."

Then Pierce Butler called for his horse and rode with me to Kilsallagh. And before the

dawn I stood in the Friar's Field and watched for the sun, while Pierce looked to the priming of my father's pistols.

When he had done this he turned to me.

- "You will fire low?" he asked.
- "As high as his heart," I answered.
- "Is there a woman's face in the matter?"
- "Aye, that there is," I cried out, "as fair as ever I saw." And I remembered how he had wed Betty Barton.
- "Then good luck to your wooing," he said, "for there is Dom Cassidy by the Friar's Tomb, and Roger Blake with him."

After this they measured the ground at twelve paces, whilst I waited looking away from them lest anger against Dom should shake me again and make my aim unsteady, for it was in my mind to kill him.

But I swear that it was the twelve paces that saved Dom's life, seeing that I was used to fifteen, and had winged Festus O'Neill, at twenty. So it was that I went no nearer to the heart than the left hip and there the ball stayed. And afterwards, when my anger was cooled, I was glad that I had done no more than hip

him, since he was no coward and would never hunt again.

For many days after I had hipped Dom Cassidy in the Friar's Field, I hunted the fox. but the Lady of the Black Feather no longer followed the hounds. Then missing her face I wearied of the chase, and in a little fell into a strange humour, and the wine went sour upon my stomach. And since my face was heavy, and I had no mind to jest, my friends whispered together over their cups that there was a curse upon me, and that I would die before the leaves withered. So, seeing that my presence chilled their mirth and made their wine taste bitter, I supped no longer in company, but, for the voices of friends, listened to the winds that cried in the trees about Kilsallagh. But at night, I would mount the red mare and ride through the Valley of the Pines and by the Shepherd's Crossing to the Heron's Pool, going over the selfsame way that I had followed the hounds with the Lady of the Black Feather.

Now it happened one night that the moon was at the full as I came to the Well of the

Three Sisters, and before me I saw the white horse and the dark shape of his rider. Her face was veiled as it had been, but I could not doubt who it was that sate so proudly in the saddle looking into the well. I took my hat from my head and bowed low before her.

"You have returned," I said.

She looked at me without surprise.

- "I have returned," she answered.
- "The chase has missed you," I went on.
- "I will hunt the fox no more," she returned, coldly. Then she rode away from the Well. For a moment I was in doubt what to do, but I had missed her so greatly that I was in no mood to lose her thus lightly. So I followed her.

For a little while she seemed to be unaware of my presence. Then she turned and looked back at me.

- "Why do you follow me, sir?" she asked.
- "I cannot tell, Madam," I answered, confused by the suddenness of the question, "unless it be for love."

"Love, love!" she echoed, and her voice thrilled me. "What proof would you give?"

"What proof you will," I returned, my heart leaping.

She seemed to hesitate a moment.

"Be it so then," she said, and I could not tell if she mocked me: "follow me and prove your love."

She struck the horse sharply upon the flank with her whip, and plunged forward in the moonlight; and I, scarce knowing what I did, rode after her. The shadows of the trees fell across our path, and the red mare feared them greatly, but the white horse went on without swerving. I could not tell what was in the lady's mind that she rode so swiftly, and this night the white horse sped faster than ever before, so that the red mare had some ado to hang upon his flanks.

At times, where the shadows deepened, a cry of warning was choked on my lips, but the white horse went on bravely. My blood was on fire and the strangeness of the thing bewildered

Whither would she go, and whither would she lead me? I held the rein loosely, for the red mare no longer gnawed at the bit. I felt her sinews throb at every stride, yet the white horse kept his lead.

How long we rode I cannot tell, but suddenly I was aware that we had crossed the stream and were making for the Devil's Dyke. My tongue strove to cry out, but no sound could I utter. As we crossed the ridge leading to the valley where the waters flowed, the lady turned her head and looked back, but there was no sound save that of the galloping hoofs. I heard the roar of the waters and saw the white horse rise for the leap; then I could tell nothing save that the waters dripped, and the birds sang above my head soothing the pain.

When I opened my eyes I saw the Lady of the Black Feather kneeling beside me. face was no longer veiled and I thought her eyes were tender.

- "Are you greatly hurt?" she asked.
- "I know not," I replied. "How did it come about?"

For answer she pointed with her finger.

There on the green sward close by the torrent lay the quiet body of the red mare.

I turned suddenly and looked at her.

"You would have killed me?" I said.

The light wavered in her eyes, but she did not answer me.

- "Why would you have killed me?" I persisted.
  - "Because of my oath," she murmured.
- "And now?" I went on, with my eyes on her face.
  - "I would rather die myself," she said.

At that I caught her hand to my lips.

- "Then," I cried, "there shall be peace between us—and love. See, the dawn breaks, and the sun will be our witness."
- "Alas, no," she made answer. "My oath forbids it. I have sworn."
- "What have you sworn that will keep us apart?" I broke out, hotly.
- "That I will never rest while there is one stone upon another in Kilsallagh," she returned as though she were repeating a lesson.
- "It is a strange oath," said I; "and yet I cannot call you an enemy."

She looked at me with a sudden eagerness.

- "Do you love Kilsallagh greatly?" she asked.
- "As dearly as my honour," I answered, rising to my feet.

She sighed deeply, and I marvelled that her spirit had grown so weak.

- "You set little store by a woman's love," she said.
- "I would set the love of Peggy MacDermot against all the world," I cried.
  - "Against Kilsallagh?"
  - "I do not understand."

The colour rose in her cheeks and her eyes flashed.

- "On the day that Kilsallagh falls, if I be still a maid, I will wed Con Clery."
- "The house of my fathers!" I cried out, seeing what was in her mind. "Would you have me destroy my fathers' home?"

For a little while she did not answer me, but stood looking down into the swirling waters of the Devil's Dyke. Then suddenly she raised her head proudly and looked eastward.

"The sun has risen," she said, and her voice was cold; "'tis time to be going."

She turned as though she would leave me, but I stretched out my hands.

- "Let there be peace between us," I cried.
- "Peace," she echoed bitterly. "I have done with peace. Farewell!"
  - "We shall meet again," I burst out.
  - "Where shall we meet?" she asked.
  - "Where you will," I returned.

A strange light came into her eyes.

- "Be it so then, at the church of St. Bride," she made answer.
- "The Church of St. Bride!" I exclaimed, wondering if she jested.
- "Where ten days hence I wed Dominick Cassidy."
- "He will never walk straight again," I cried, "since I have left a ball in his hip."
- "What matters it so he help me!" she returned, and her voice was sad.

What I would have said I know not, for a sudden weakness seized me, and I would have fallen to the ground had she not caught me.

"I fear you are sadly hurt," she said gently; "'twas a heavy fall."

Then she called the white horse, and he came to her, leaving the sweet grass.

- "He shall carry you home," she went on.
- "To Kilsallagh?"
- "Aye, to Kilsallagh," she answered.
- "That he shall never do," I cried as bravely as I might, albeit my head swam and my limbs were nerveless.
  - "And wherefore shall he not?"
- "Since you are my enemy," I returned weakly.
- "There shall be peace between us—for this day," she made answer, and a smile curved her lips.
- "Be it so then," I said, "for in truth I am as a child and have no strength to debate the matter."

Then she stood by me while I climbed into the saddle, and so, I riding and she on foot, we took our way to Kilsallagh, and neither spoke a word for the trouble that was in our hearts.

At the gate of Kilsallagh I dismounted,

heavily enough for the fall had been no light one.

- "Farewell," I said, "and I thank you for your courtesy."
- "'Tis a trifling matter," she returned, taking the reins. "Farewell."
- "We shall meet at the Church of St. Bride," I cried out.
- "Farewell," she repeated, turning her face from me.

Then before I could find another word she was in the saddle and riding briskly away from me, nor even once looked back albeit I was hungry for her face. So I returned to my home sore shaken in body and mind, and it comforted me little that Dom Cassidy would never walk straight again, since tendays hence he would wed the Lady of the Black Feather. Then I threw myself upon my bed, hating Kilsallagh, because I loved it so greatly. For three days I had no thought for food and scarce looked upon the wine, but lay in silence, feeling that death was near to me, and having no heart to live. And so I might have remained longer, had it not been for Brian, my cousin's butler,

who for love had come with me from Duhallow. But he, seeing into what strange humour I had fallen, besought me to breathe a vein that my brain might have ease.

At that I fell into a passion, swearing that I had no mind to lose a drop of my own blood while my enemy lived.

But Brian looked at me gravely, shaking his white head.

"'Twould be better," said he, "to slay your enemy than to die in bed through hate of him."

My heart leapt at his words, and I cursed my folly that my wits had been so dull.

"Bring the wine, Brian," I cried out, "for I will drink to the memory of Dom Cassidy."

"He is a lame man," said Brian, as though he challenged his memory.

"So he would be better in heaven," I returned.

Then I drank the buttered claret, and ceased to be sad, for I was resolved to kill Dom Cassidy after that he had wedded Peggy MacDermot, and the thought of it made me a man again.

So I bade my friends come sup with me to drink in Peggy MacDermot's wedding-day, and they came, marvelling that I should show so much honour to Thady MacDermot's daughter, and thinking 'twas because my father had loved him.

And when the wine flowed and the company were tired of boasting, Rody Macnamara kissed my cheek, swearing that he loved me, and together we wept because the red mare would follow the fox no more.

When it was but an hour past dawn we rose and left the wine and the candles still burning on the table, for I was in no mind to be late for the wedding. Brian lay by the door, for age had made his head weak and he drank the wine with the confidence of youth. So we mounted our horses and rode away from Kilsallagh, taking the road to the church of St. Bride, and in my holster I carried my father's pistols.

- "Have you a gift for Dom Cassidy?" asked one of them.
  - "Aye, that I have," I made answer.
  - "Silver or gold?" he went on.

"'Tis neither," said I, "since I am a poor man, and he needs neither gold nor silver. Yet I will wager my honour upon it that he will be satisfied."

When we reached the church of St. Bride, Dom Cassidy was there with his friends, and Dom leant against the door as though he would hide his lameness, but Peggy MacDermot was not yet come. So we sate in our saddles and waited. And as time went on and still the bride lingered, Dom's face grew paler and he stood now upon one foot, now upon another, gnawing his lip. And, as I watched him, I measured his shape so that my hand might not err again.

I cannot tell how long we waited, but the company grew weary and Rody swore that the man that waited for his bride at the church door might write himself cuckold for ever after. But I smiled, thinking of the business which was toward and being in nowise impatient because it was delayed. So I fixed my eyes upon Dom Cassidy as he leaned against the wall, with his head facing the road to Kilfenora. Suddenly I saw him start, and he leaned

forward eagerly. Then I too caught the sound of wheels and of horses leisurely driven.

"'Tis the bride," cried Martin D'Arcy, waking out of the half-sleep into which he had fallen, "and see, she does her father no discredit."

A coach drawn by six horses splendidly caparisoned, came round the bend of the road and halted in the midst of us. In an instant every man had sprung from the saddle and stood waiting to give her welcome; and I came near to the coach between it and the church, so that I might see the lady's face. Dom Cassidy brushed past me, forgetting his lameness, and threw open the door of the coach.

Then the lady stepped from it, and a cry of surprise broke from the company, for she was clad not in white but all in black save for the red feather in her hat; but her face none of us could see for the heavy veil.

Dom knelt and kissed her hand, and I was glad to see how ill he did it and at what pains he was to rise again, because of the ball that was in his hip.



Then, coming suddenly to a resolve, I stood between them, and making the lady a low bow I said:

- "Madam, I have been true to my pledge."
- I saw the lace quiver about her white throat.
- "I thank you, sir," she murmured, and there was no pride in her voice.

What I might have said I know not, but Dom Cassidy pushed me aside, with his hand upon his sword. Then before I could answer him, Martin D'Arcy cried out:

- "Peace, peace, it is a wedding, let there be peace."
- "Aye, let there be peace," I answered, drawing back, "till the lady is wed." And I struck my sword sharply into its sheath, so that the hilt rang against the scabbard.

The lady seemed to hesitate a moment, and then went slowly towards the church, and Dom Cassidy limped by her side.

Of a sudden, the sound of a galloping horse smote my ears; then followed the cry of:

"Kilsallagh, Kilsallagh!"

I turned round, and saw the face of the horseman. It was Brian, but so full of fear

and grief that I could scarce tell if it was he.

- "Kilsallagh, Kilsallagh," he cried, throwing himself to the ground before us. "Oh, master, Kilsallagh."
- "What of Kilsallagh?" said a voice beside me. It was Peggy MacDermot that spoke.
- "Aye, what of Kilsallagh?" I exclaimed, repeating her words.

The fellow gasped for breath, so that I was fain to shake him.

"What of Kilsallagh?" I said again, thinking Brian's wits had left him.

He broke into a fit of harsh, wild laughter.

"Nothing of Kilisallagh?" he cried; "an hour ago it was burned to the ground. There is not one stone of it upon another. Kilsallagh, Kilsallagh," and he fell at my feet, with foam on his lips.

I was so dazed by the suddenness of the thing that I stood silent, watching the senseless form before me and unheeding the murmurs of regret that were about me. Then I felt a soft touch on my arm, and turning, looked into the face of Peggy MacDermot, no longer

veiled, but bright and fresh and more beautiful than ever before.

- "Let there be peace between us," she whispered.
  - "'Till you are wedded," I answered.
- "And for ever after," she went on, with her hand on my sleeve, "if my husband love me."
- "I dare swear that he will," I returned bitterly, "as long as he lives."
  - "What would you do?" she asked.
- "Kill the man that weds Peggy Mac-Dermot," I said.
- "Would you leave her a widow?" she asked smiling.
- "Shall I lose her and Kilsallagh together?" I cried out.

She hung her head, and I saw the colour mount from her neck to her brow.

Then I understood.

- "I love you," I burst out.
- "More than Kilsallagh?" she asked.
- "Aye, as dearly as my honour," I returned.
- "The priest waits," she whispered.

Then I caught her in my arms before them all and kissed her.

"He shall not wait long," I whispered, leading her to the door, while the company followed, silent because the strangeness of the thing.

As we went into the church I caught sight of Dom Cassidy's face, and for an instant my heart was smitten with pity for him; but the lady's face was radiant.

## CHAPTER IX

#### A MONK OF THE BLACK CLOISTER

Showing how Morry Lestrange resolved to play the man, and what came of it

MAURICE LESTRANGE was a proud man, yet he had no lack of courage to match his pride, and his sword was readier than his tongue. In youth he had been gay and a lover of wine and good company. 'Twas said that he had loved Grace Delaney greatly, and that after she had wed Con Clery, a cloud fell upon his brow and never left it. Then he swore that he would look no more upon the face of a woman, since his pride was hurt because the lady had thought Con Clery the better man.

And, for me, I would that he had kept his vow so that I might never have been born to bring shame and dishonour upon a proud and honourable name.

But one night, not many days after Con Clery's wedding, my father supped with Sir Miles Bagenal and a goodly company at Kilfenora. And albeit the wine flowed merrily and jest and laughter were not lacking, Maurice Lestrange sat with heavy brows, and drank the buttered claret in silence, until at last Sir Phelim Burke cried shame upon him because his face was pale and he had no heart to be gay.

"I had rather be dead," said he, "than see a man weep into his wine-cup, and he a straight shot, near as straight as myself."

My father raised his eyes to Sir Phelim's face.

"You were ever a braggart, Phelim," he returned slowly, "and the sound of your voice has often made me wish that I had been born deaf so that I might not feel shame when they called you a man or that I left you to drown in the Devil's Dyke when we were boys together."

"'Twere better that you had been born dumb," Sir Phelim made answer, "since speech to an unwilling ear has served you little, and thinking on another man's bride has made the blood cold in you, so that you have forgotten your pistols and the honour of a gentleman."

- "I looked upon them at noon to-day, in the sunlight," Maurice Lestrange answered, so calmly that all the company marvelled what had killed the spirit in him.
- "Lestrange of Kilmacduagh was a man," broke in Sir Phelim, "and he loved the barkers."
- "There was no spot of rust upon them," my father continued, as though he had not heard, "albeit they have been too long idle."
- "'Tis a coward's complaint!" cried Sir Phelim, for he loved my father and hated to think that a woman had killed the man in him.

So it was that they met upon the Down of Clapook, and the luck was on the side of Sir Phelim, for he winged my father, but Maurice Lestrange's ball went wide. And the wound was long in healing, so that my father had leisure for thought, and it grieved him greatly that he had been near death and yet had no heir to his name. So he called Sir Miles Bagenal and bade him seek out a bride for

him, comely and sound of limb and of good blood, to be the mother of his son, since for himself he had no mind to woo again.

Then Sir Miles mounted his horse and rode straight to the Manor of Dromore, where he found Julia Considine gathering flowers in the garden, and being already weary of her maidenhood, because no man had sought her, albeit she was comely and not lacking in spirit.

And when she learned that Maurice Lestrange was sick and would not mend for love of her, she wept a little, more for joy than in sorrow. Then she took a rose from her girdle, and begged him take it to Maurice Lestrange and bid him mend quickly, lest his bride die of impatience.

So in a little while my father's friends, and Sir Phelim amongst them, drank to the new mistress of Kilmacduagh, and to the heir that should be.

Maurice Lestrange was a good lover, and showed the lady much tenderness until she bore him a daughter. When the news was brought him, he fell into a passion, and for many days would not look upon the face of

either, since he had hoped for a son and no puling girl to inherit his name. But when I was born his joy was so great that he forgave them both, declaring that my sister Pamela would have a man to defend her when he was dead.

And in this he did not err, for since she grew up straight and comely and her eyes were brighter than the stars, there was no lack of gentlemen to draw the sword or point a pistol in her honour. She had a quick spirit too and no little wit, and even in her dreams had no thought of fear, being ever where the chase was hottest and little behind her father when the fox was run to earth.

And seeing her I marvelled greatly, wishing that I had never been born or else that my sister was a man, seeing that she loved all those things which I hated and had little care for the things that belong to women. But strive as I might, I could not look upon the blade of a sword without fear and the report of a pistol made my heart ache.

Neither had I any love for the wine cup, and the buttered claret made me sad to think that I grew none the merrier for it. But most of all I feared my father's eye, lest I should see in it the knowledge that his heir was a craven and weaker than a woman when the wine flowed.

So I must needs hide the fear that was in my heart and would often feign sickness or an affair of gallantry when the hounds met at the Shepherd's Crossing or hunted the fox by the Heron's pool. Then I would ride through the Vale of Kilmacduagh, past the Black Cloister, until I could hear no longer the notes of the horn thrown back from the Grey Crags that lean above Kilsallagh.

And my father loved me so greatly that he forgave me because I found solitude sweeter than company, and it was more to my liking to sing to the harp than to drink with my friends when the sun was set.

"He is like his mother in that," said he. remembering that my mother had been wont to sing when she was lonesome and forgetting that he had hated the sound of her spinet, "but he is a Lestrange for all his singing, and soon the bark of a pistol will be sweeter in his ears than the sound of the harp. Look at his eyes, Pamela. They are my own eyes though his mother looks out of them. Yet I would that there was fire in them," he went on thoughtfully.

- "He is but a boy," my sister answered, "and boys are most like their mother."
- "Like their mother!" my father repeated with some anger.
  - "Until they become men."
  - "And then?"
  - "They do as their fathers did."
- "But, Pam, you are but two years older and a girl."
- "Yet we grow faster," said Pamela, "since we have less to do when we are grown."

Then I heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and knew that they were riding away.

So I covered my face with my hands, and in agony of shame prayed for that which had been denied me. Then I sprang to my feet with a sudden resolve.

"'Tis because I am a water-drinker," I cried out, "that my blood is pale and my heart sluggish."

I bade old Sylvester, my father's butler, bring

the wine and see that it was to my liking. He looked at me in amaze, as though he were dreaming and had not heard aright. And in truth for that he was little to blame seeing that I had been wont to drink the claret as though it were vinegar and with a wry face.

"Let it be as my father drinks it," I said, "since I am his son and the heir to his name, so I would have you spare the butter."

So he brought the wine, still wondering, and seeing me drink he could contain his joy no longer.

- "Bless you, Master Morry," he cried out, "for never was one of your race that was afeared of the bottle. A Lestrange for ever!"
- "Have the black mare saddled," I said, "for I have business from home."
- "The black mare!" he repeated, remembering how I was used to ride my father's old hunter.
- "Aye, the black mare," I returned, "since she will carry me faster."

So I drank the wine until I fancied myself a man of spirit and was proud that I was a Lestrange, and had the right to defend the

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honour of the family. Then I drew my sword from its sheath and cut the air with it. The red sun caught the rust upon the blade like a stain of blood. My limbs trembled and my hand grew nerveless holding the hilt.

"'Tis the sword of a coward," I broke out, half in anger, half in fear lest I should fall again into despair of my manhood. Then I turned to the wine again and drank deep, holding the sword.

"The mare is saddled," said Sylvester.

I turned to him in anger.

"Is this the sword of a gentleman?" I cried, lifting the blade.

He drew back a little, scanning it with narrowed eyes.

"There is blood upon it," he said, and there was pride in his voice.

"Aye, blood," I burst out, "blood, blood! Would you have a gentleman's sword bright as that of a dancing master?" And I shot it into its scabbard so bravely that it rang like the clash of arms.

"The sword of a Lestrange," murmured the old man.

Then I got me into the saddle, and rode swiftly through the Vale of Kilmacduagh taking the road to Clapook. My brain was burning and the wine ran riot in my blood.

"A Lestrange and a coward!" I cried out in derision, as the black mare sprang through the Hunter's Gap, spurning the purple heather and scattering the bloom of the yellow gorse.

When I came to the Hill of Furze, I drew rein a moment in doubt, not knowing which way I should take. Then I remembered how that Dick Delahunt had bidden me sup with him, having, as I believe, little thought to see me face the bottle, but rather desiring to do honour to my father. So I turned to the left and rode as straight as I might to Clapook.

The sun faded out of the west, and the air was keen, so that my teeth ached. The shadows of fear were near my heart but I spurred the faster, that I might leave the coward and the memory of him behind me.

"Lestrange of Kilmacduagh," I muttered betwixt my chattering teeth, and the wine still aided my weakening resolve. "It is not fear but the chill wind," and I rode faster until

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I saw the candles burning upon Dick Delahunt's table and the wine as red as blood. Then I threw myself from my horse and broke in upon the company.

- "Morry Lestrange!" cried Dick Delahunt in wonder.
- "There is no thirstier man in the kingdom," I answered.
- "There is no water in the house," said Delahunt sorrowfully.
- "May I die of thirst if I will ever drink water again," I cried out; "'tis no drink for a Lestrange of Kilmacduagh!"

At that Rody Macnamara caught my hand, and lifting the wine cried out:

"Lestrange of Kilmacduagh!"

Then all the company rose, and bowing low to me cried out, "Lestrange of Kilmacduagh!" drinking to me with such appearance of goodwill that my heart was full of joy. Then when I had drunk, I sat down amongst them with Dick Delahunt on my right and before me was Rody Macnamara."

"You have left your books, Morry?" said Dick.

- "Aye, that I have," I returned, gulping the wine.
  - "They are dull companions," he went on.
- "I would I had never seen them," I cried out, for Rody's eye troubled me, since I read wonder in it and doubt together.
- "Leave them to the monks then, Morry," he returned, "since men are the books for a man of spirit; and the wine is sweeter than the sound of the harp. By my honour I am glad that you have made friends with the bottle. Will you hunt the fox to-morrow?"
- "Aye, that I will," I answered, "if the black mare carry me."
  - "The black mare," said Rody.
- "Would you have me saddle a horse from the plough?" I cried out in anger, for I knew what was in his mind, and hated him for it.
- "Nay, Morry," he made answer, "but I would have you return to Kilmacduagh a whole man."
- "Wherefore should I do otherwise?" I burst out hotly.
- "Since I have little trust in the black mare when the huntsman blows his horn," he returned

very gently, but the wine was in my head, and his speech angered me the more for its gentleness.

- "You think me a child?" I cried out.
- "You are a brave man's son," he answered.
- "What of myself?" I went on furiously.

He did not answer me, but looked at the wine, slowly raising it to his lips. So scarce knowing what I did, I leaned forward and dashed the wine from his hand.

The blood filled his cheeks a moment, then he went pale again and I thought he trembled. So I grew mad to think that I was a brave man, and raising my hand again I would have struck him in the face but that Dick Delahunt drew me back.

"It is enough," he said coldly, "the honour of a gentleman shall be satisfied," and he turned to Rody Macnamara.

Rody bowed low before me, and there was a great trouble in his eyes.

"When and where you will, sir," he said, "you shall have the satisfaction of a gentle-man."

"And prove you a coward and braggart," I

went on, fearing lest my spirit should become weak before I had settled the business. "Let there be no delay," for I was eager to prove myself a man while the wine flowed.

"Nay, nay, that shall not be," cried Delahunt.

"Let the boy's head cool and his hand grow steady for the barkers. An hour after dawn in the Friar's Field."

After this I knew no more until I was in the saddle, and had turned the black mare's head towards the Vale of Kilmacduagh. The moon shone large and full above my head, and the road was white as though it were covered with snow. The air was chill and the wine was begun to cool in me when I came within the shadow of the Hill of Furze. Then the darkness caught me and I began to grow sick.

So I spurred on the faster, and the black mare carried me bravely as though my hand on the rein was no new thing. When I reached my home, the sweat was heavy upon my brow, but my limbs were cold and shook as if I had caught the ague.

In the shadows of the trees I saw two horses and a fellow holding them. So I sprang from

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the saddle, and throwing the reins to him, I went into the house, my sword jangling and my spurs clinking on the marble of the hall. At the door of the supper chamber, I paused an instant, breathing heavily. Then I thrust open the door and stood upon the threshold.

The candles still burned upon the table, and the glitter of light from the silver dazzled my eyes. In the great oak chair at the end of the chamber sate my father with the wine before him, and by his side stood Pamela, her white fingers clasping a gold-mounted riding whip. The sight of it sent a chill to my heart, for not ten days ago Rody Macnamara had given it her, because she was first at the death when they killed the fox at the Heron's Pool.

- "You have come back, Morry," said my father.
- "Aye, and a thirstier man never left good company," I answered, brushing the sweat from my brow.

My father pushed the wine towards me.

"Drink, Morry," he said, "for a dry tongue makes a dull speaker."

So I seized the cup, and raising it to my lips

drained it to the last drop. Then I set it down so rudely that the table rang and the light of the candles flickered.

- "I come from Clapook," I went on, "and Dick Delahunt bids me give you his service."
- "A gallant company, I make no doubt," said he.
- "As brave as ever I saw," I returned, "and the wine good," and I drank again.
  - "Yet you left it early."
- "Since I have business at day-break," and for the moment I was proud of it, seeing the light that came into my father's eyes.
- "You'll be wanting the barkers," he said, striving to speak calmly. But my sister's face was troubled.
  - "What will you do, Morry?" she asked.
  - "Teach a churl manners," I made answer.
- "Who is the churl, Morry?" my father asked, looking up from the pistols.
- "Rody Macnamara," I returned, watching my sister's face.

The whip fell from her fingers, and for an instant the blood filled her cheeks; then she

A MONK OF THE BLACK CLOISTER 249 grew pale as the ashes of the spent fire upon the hearth.

- "I thought him a gentleman of honour," said she, with trembling lips.
- "He is a straight shot," said my father thoughtfully, as he held the pistol to the light, fixing the flint. "You must hip him, Morry."
- "Aye, I will hip him," I answered, beginning to tremble again at the sight of the barkers. I would have drunk again, but my father caught my hand.
- "To-morrow," he said, "we will drink together to the memory of Rody Macnamara; shall we not, Pamela?"

But my sister bent her head, answering nothing.

Then he placed in my hands the case of pistols.

"At fifteen paces the Viper will serve your purpose best; if you come nearer together Lucifer will lay your man. Aim no higher than the hip, and Rody will never walk straight again."

Then he kissed my cheek and bade me rest awhile before dawn so that my hand should be steady and my eye clear, and I knew that no man living was prouder of his son than he, and none with so little reason.

So I left them, fearing to look at my sister's face, and knowing only that her hand was cold as I kissed it. When I was alone in my bed-chamber, the courage that the wine had given was dead in me. I laid the case of pistols upon the table, and as I did so my unsteady hand touched the spring so that the case flew open. For some moments I gazed at it with the fascination of fear. There lay Viper and Lucifer, a bag of bullets and a horn of powder beside them, the stocks worn with much handling and carved roughly with crosses and notches which my father, and they who had gone before him, had set there.

Then suddenly I closed the lid, shrinking from the case as though an evil spirit were shut within it. Turning to the window, I looked out. The moon was no longer bright but hidden at times by scurrying masses of cloud, and the tall poplar trees bent sighing before the wind. Far away on the mountains I heard the cry of the curlew and knew that the dawn was

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not far off. So, shuddering, I turned from the window and, having unbuckled my sword, I threw myself upon my bed, praying for sleep or wine to give me heart again. I shut my eyes, fearing to see the dawn break and heard nothing save the wild beating of my heart. Then suddenly the first notes of the blackbird's song smote my ear, and I started up in terror to see the chamber filled with the cold grey light of early morning. Then I buried my face in my pillow praying that I might die in my bed and never hear the report of a pistol.

As I lay, my quick ear caught the sound of a light footstep; the door of my chamber was opened gently and someone came into the room. Not daring to rise I feigned sleep, striving between half-closed eyelids to discern who it was that had come to me and what his purpose was.

He went warily as though he feared to awake me. At first I thought it was my father and that he had come to see to the pistols lest anything should be amiss, but it was not, for the figure was that of a young man of my own stature and clad in black.

For an instant my wonder was almost

greater than my fear, and I was about to cry out, asking who he was, when I saw him lift the case of pistols from the place where I had placed them. Then he took my sword and girt it about him. When he had done this he drew a deep sigh as though he were afflicted with no common trouble, and turning round, for the first time looked down upon me. Then I knew that my visitor was no man at all but my sister Pamela, and dressed like a man. Her cheek was pale and her eyes weary, but on her lips was the seal of a great resolution.

"A Lestrange of Kilmacduagh," she murmured, thinking that I slept. "A Lestrange of Kilmacduagh," and she sighed again very heavily. Then she went out taking the pistols with her, and having my sword girt about her.

Suddenly it flashed upon my mind what she would do and how she, a woman, would save the honour of her family. So I fell back upon my bed, quaking with shame and fear, and wishing that I had never been born, and yet afraid to face death with a pistol in my hand.

"I am fit only for the cloister," I moaned, holding my knees and rocking to and fro like

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a child; and all the while the blackbird sang in the tree, maddening me with his gay mockery.

Now after this I know not what I did nor how it came about that before the sun was an hour risen I lay behind the Friar's Tomb looking out upon the Friar's Field. The clouds were still heavy and upon the grass lay a white mist, but the wind had fallen.

On a sudden I saw three gentlemen come from the Seven Beeches that lay north of the Friar's Field. Two of them walked erect, but he that was between them went heavily and hung his head as though he had no mind for the business.

I crouched lower, yet the fear well-nigh left my heart, when I saw how sad was the face of Rody Macnamara. They came near to where I lay behind the great tomb, and stood waiting with the mist white upon their cloaks, but Rody's arms were crossed and his head bent as though his thoughts were none of the pleasantest.

So I watched them, half forgetting my share in the matter, and that it was to meet me that they had come.

At length Pierce Butler grew impatient.

"I tell you, Rody," he burst out, "that if we wait here till the leaves are dead and the branches bare, Morry Lestrange will never look in the face of a man over a pistol."

"I thought him a man last night," said Delahunt thoughtfully, "and his eye was full of courage. The quarrel was of his own making, Pierce."

Pierce Butler laughed in scorn,

"He has the eye of a fawn," he retorted.
"Twas the claret that misled you. I will wager a hundred guineas he will never come."

At that Rody Macnamara turned angrily upon him.

"I will wager my honour, Pierce," he cried, "that he will come. A Lestrange of Kilmacduagh and afraid of a pistol!" and he laughed aloud, yet there was no mirth in his laughter.

"You will kill him then?" said Pierce Butler.

"Nay, that will I not," returned Rody, "for he is a little more than a child, but he shall be winged for his folly. I would not leave his father without an heir."

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- "I was thinking of his sister," Butler rejoined.
  - "What of his sister?" Rody cried out angrily.
- "She has the spirit of a man and I doubt not can handle the barkers. I never saw a lady ride straighter," and he looked at Macnamara.
- "Let her be then," he returned, "since it is not a woman but a man that we look for. See, there is Morry Lestrange at last," and he took his hat from his head and bowed. Then they moved away from the place where I lay, wrestling with fear and shame and vanquished by both.

When they were gone I peered forth from my hiding place and saw Pamela standing upon the sward, with the mists thick about her. I could scarce credit my eyes, so wonderfully had she disguised herself, for I seemed to be gazing upon my own shape, grown prouder and more upright than ever before.

I could not tell if I was dreaming when they measured the ground at twelve paces as near as I could judge, and Pamela stood with her eyes turned toward the mountains as though what they did had little concern for her.

Then Dick Delahunt took my father's pistols from the case, and having looked to the priming he put one of them in Pamela's hand, and doubtless he spoke some word of warning, for I saw her bow her head, though I could not tell if she answered him.

Rody Macnamara had taken off his hat, but seeing that his enemy was covered, he set it again upon his head, being resolved to take no advantage in the matter, at least so I judged it, watching them as though they were figures in a dream.

But when I heard Pierce Butler cry out, and saw the pistols lifted, I knew that it was no dream. I stretched out my hands, striving to speak, but my tongue was dry, and could not utter a word.

Then I heard the report of a pistol: Rody had fired first. A moment later I saw my sister raise her pistol and fire in the air.

"By my soul, he has fired dumb!" Dick Delahunt burst out, running up, but before he could reach her she had fallen prone upon the ground. My head swam, and for a

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moment my wits left me. Then I heard a great cry from Rody Macnamara.

"My God, my God, it is Pamela, and not Morry at all!" and he knelt beside her.

Something seemed to burst in my brain filling my eyes with blood. A wild terror seized me, and clambering out of my hiding place I fled away as if all the demons of hell were in pursuit of me, and never stopped until I fell exhausted and fainting upon the threshold of the Black Cloister.

For many days I knew nothing for the fever that was in my blood; but when I began to mend a great peace fell upon me, seeing the narrow walls of my cell, and knowing that my shame would not pursue me within them. So I resolved that I would never leave the Black Cloister, but wear the dark robe till I died.

I sent a message to my father, telling him that I had no love for the world or business in it, and was minded to live and die a monk; but of Pamela I said nothing, through fear that, maybe, Rody's ball had found her heart.

To this my father answered that he had ever

desired a son to bear his name and handle his barkers, but since I had no business in the world 'twas better that I should leave it. And this troubled him the less since he had taken to his heart a man of spirit, to be in the place of his son; and he enjoined me, since I was become a monk and had much leisure for prayer, that I should pray often for the happiness of my sister Pamela, who was that day wedded to Rody Macnamara in the Church of St. Bride, and that she might bear a son to do honour to his race.

And never since have I looked in the eyes of any save the monks of the Black Cloister, but sometimes in my dreams I see the face of my sister Pamela as I saw it in the Friar's Field with the mists about it turned to gold.

#### CHAPTER X

#### MY LADY'S GARTER

Wherein Dick Lawless loses his estate and wins it back again

The heat of the wine had died in me, and my heart was heavy as I left my lord Garmoy's company, and took the road to the Manor of Graig. The dawn was but an hour broke, and the wind was cold, yet I rode slowly, being in truth not greatly anxious to arrive speedily at the home of my fathers. An empty purse is but a sad travelling companion, and I took no joy in the sunshine. Since noon of the day before I had challenged my fortune at the cards and drunk the buttered claret, but the luck was against me, albeit I strove bravely to win it back.

So I rose from my lord's table beggared of

my guineas, and pushing the heap of gold from me I made a bow to lack Vernon.

"I have no luck at the cards, sir," I said, "and will try my fortune no longer."

"Why then you shall be lucky in love," he answered, eyeing the gold with much satisfaction; "and a woman's face shall make you forget your quarrel with the cards."

"I had liefer look upon a man's face, if it were honest," I returned with some heat, for between us there was no love since the day that I outrode him and took the fox's brush hard by the Well of the Three Sisters, and 'twould have pleased me more had my guineas gone to one whom I loved better. Then I would have left them; but my lord, seeing me rise, cried out upon me:

"Shame on you, Dick Lawless, to leave company when the night is young and the wine plentiful. Your father would have seen the day break and cared nothing for it, so the candles were bright and the claret was to his liking. Sure, Dick, you would not be wiser than your own father."

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So I stood listening and not knowing what to do.

"Play no more to-night, Dick," Piers Butler whispered in my ear. Then he turned to my Lord Garmoy. "Sir Richard has ill-luck with the cards to-night," he said, "and I think he has business in the morning."

But my lord answered hotly:

"Let him finish his business to-night, as his father would have done, and I loved no man better, though Roger Blake was my friend. And as for luck, why the fickle jade will never follow him that flies from her. Drink, gentlemen, drink to the memory of the bravest man in the kingdom, Sir Richard Lawless." And he raised the wine to his lips.

So they all rose and drank to the memory or my father, whilst I stood hot and angry because I was my lord's guest and had no choice but to obey him, albeit the wine had dulled his wits. So, making him a low bow, I said:

"I thank you, my lord, and all the other gentlemen, for your courtesy, and in truth I had not thought that my presence was so agreeable.

Since it is so, I will stay until the day break whether luck be with me or against me."

So I sat down at the table again, and looking at Jack Vernon's smiling face, I said:

- "Deal the cards."
- "I would not weary you," he retorted with a sneer.
- "Then deal quickly," and I took a deep draught of the wine.
  - "The stakes?" he inquired softly.
  - I hesitated a moment, then I answered:
  - "Five games of a thousand guineas."
- "Five thousand guineas!" he cried out in surprise.
- "I think the Manor of Graig is worth so much," I replied calmly,
  - "I think that it is," he rejoined, "but-"
- "If I lose," I went on, "you shall have five thousand guineas within thirty days, or else the Manor of Graig shall be yours. Are you satisfied?"
- "I have the word of a man of honour!" he said with some hesitation.
- "Do you doubt it?" I broke out angrily, thinking of my pistols.

"I do not," he made answer, and began dealing the cards.

Now at first I had some luck, and the cards favoured me a little, so that I had some hope to win back what I had lost; but when the day broke I stood up from the table broken in fortune, and my estate pledged for my honour.

So it was that I rode slowly to my home, and my thoughts were none of the pleasantest. When I was within a little of the village of Duisk, which lay about half way between my Lord Garmoy's house and the Manor of Graig, my horse took fright, almost unseating me, so sudden was his terror. When I had brought him to obedience with bit and spur, I saw a young girl, clad in white, standing by the road-side in the shadow of a tree. I would have passed her without greeting, albeit she was a comely wench enough, but she came forward and made me a courtesy.

- "I pray you, sir," she said with great meekness, "are you already wedded?"
- "Aye, to misfortune," I returned bitterly, remembering my troubles.

- "That is not the name of a wife, sir," she retorted, and a smile curved her lips.
- "I know not save by hearsay," I said, "since I have no wife to teach me nor am like to have."

Then I would have ridden on, but she caught the rein of my bridle.

- "I make no doubt that you are a brave gentleman," she went on.
- "I have little doubt of my own courage," I returned smiling. "What proof would you have?"
  - "Will you help a lady that is in distress?"
- "Aye, that I will most readily, if a sword can be of service to her," I cried out, for I was weary of my own thoughts, and looked to the adventure for some diversion from them. "Where shall I find the lady?"
- "At the sign of the Punch Bowl yonder in the village of Duisk," she made answer, pointing with her finger.
- "And the service?" I went on, forgetting my troubles.
- "That I may not tell you, sir, since my lady would have you learn it from her own lips."

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"Sweet lips, I dare swear," I said.

She looked up at me, and the tears dimmed her eyes.

"Sir," she replied gravely, "a gentleman might well give his life for a kind word from them, since even a poor serving lass would die rather than see my lady in trouble."

So I asked no more, but rode by her side until we were come to the inn. There I saw before the doorway a very handsome green coach, but the horses had been taken from it. On the panel I caught sight of a coat of arms, painted in black and red and surmounted by an Earl's coronet in gold. This whetted my curiosity, and made me still more eager to learn who this lady was, and what was her distress that she should have need of so broken a gentleman.

I sprang from the saddle, and, throwing the reins to an ostler, I followed the waiting maid into the inn. I hesitated upon the threshold, but turning she beckoned to me to follow. So I climbed the stairway and entered a handsome chamber, which I knew was set apart for guests of quality.

"My lady shall be instantly informed of your presence," said the girl; and making me a courtesy she went out.

So I stood by the window, looking out upon the hills and wondering upon what enterprise chance had embarked me. But, indeed, I was not left long to my own reflections. My ear caught the rustle of silk, and the next moment I bowed low before the lady.

She was tall, and her figure had the slightness of youth, but she was closely veiled, so that I could see nothing of her face, save only her eyes, which were dark and restless. She wore a cloak of scarlet, lined with white fur, and a large Spanish hat with a buckle of gold. She stood before me, in some confusion as I thought, and her fingers played with her glove.

"It grieves me, madam, to learn that you are in distress," I began, seeing that she remained silent.

"I am indeed in sore perplexity," she answered; and her voice was low and very sweet, so that I could have sworn her face was fair.

"I would serve you if I might," I went on, "since 'tis for that that I came hither."

- "For that I thank you, sir," she returned, making me a little courtesy. "It is true indeed that I need the help of an honest gentleman, and that without delay, seeing where the sun shines," and she made a gesture toward the window; "yet the aid I need is of so strange a nature that I have no heart to beg it."
  - "I would serve you, madam," I repeated.
- "Not knowing the service?" she murmured half to herself.
- "Madam," I said earnestly, "I pledge myself to serve you in any way that befits a man of honour."

She mused awhile, holding her chin in her hand. Then she turned to me suddenly:

- "Are you a lover of women?" she asked.
- "I have loved a wine-cup better," I returned.
- "And are pledged to none?" she went on.
- "No, nor am I like to be," I made answer, "since I was ruined at daybreak."
  - "Ruined!" she exclaimed.
  - "Aye, since the cards were against me."
  - "And your honour-" she began.
  - " Is safe, since I can guard it better than the

guineas;" and I laid my hand on my sword hilt. "And so I am not like to marry."

- "If you would help me you shall wed me within the hour," she said very calmly.
- "Wed you!" I cried out, half doubting my ears.
  - "Since there is no other way."
- "A broken gentleman makes a cold lover," I muttered, wondering the while if she jested.
- "I would have a husband and no lover," she burst out hotly.
- "I do not understand," I said, for the thing puzzled me like a dream.

She stamped her foot upon the ground impatiently.

- "Your wits are dull to need so much teaching!" she cried. "Listen. I will tell you. If I be not a wife before noon I must marry my cousin or lose my inheritance, for so my father willed it, as I think when the gout unsettled his mind."
- "'Twas a strange testament," I said; "but if you marry your cousin——"
- "Marry my cousin!" she broke out, with her eyes flashing. "I had rather be a beggar, and

yet I would not make him rich to my own loss. Give me your name, sir, and call me wife, and you shall never see my face again."

- "I have not seen it yet," I said.
- "It matters not," she retorted with a half smile, "since you will not be my lover. What is your name?"
  - "Richard Lawless."
- "Ah! it is a good name," she returned, as though it were not new to her.
  - "Such as it is you shall have it," I said.
- "And pay no penalty?" and I thought her eyes mocked me.
- "Save only a kiss at the altar," I made answer.
- "I thank you, sir," and she gave me her hand.
- "I would see your face," I went on, for my blood was growing hot.
- "Nay, sir, that shall you not, lest I die of shame because I have sought a husband and he unwilling."
  - "Nay, not unwilling," I broke in.
- "And I must have some thought for my father's honour, since the Earl of Inchigeela

was as proud as any in the country, albeit he has served his only daughter scurvily enough."

"The Earl of Inchigeela!" I burst out in amaze. "And you are——"

"The Lady Frances Boyle," she answered smiling, "until I become the Lady Frances Lawless. But we must not trifle longer; see the coach is ready, and there is but little time to reach the Church of St. Bride. I will steal but an hour of your time. You wear a sword?"

I bowed, wondering what was in her mind.

"It is well," she said smiling, "lest any one should envy you your good fortune. Come, sir, let us be going."

So, like one in a dream, I followed her, and having lifted her into the coach and seen the maid join her, I mounted my horse and rode behind, taking the road to the Church of St. Bride.

When we came to the Whispering Oaks that lay south of the Valley of the Pines, I met Miles Bagenal, and remembered that he was to meet Dominick Considine that same evening, with the pistols, in the Friar's Field.

"God speed all travellers!" he cried out.

"Good luck to your pistols!" I answered, without drawing rein.

The sight of him reminded me of my troubles, and I was half ashamed of my folly, seeing that I was about to pledge my name and my honour to a woman whose face I did not know, and who needed a husband but to save her lands from an unwelcome lover.

The coach went slowly, so that I jogged in my saddle, until we came within sight of the tower of the Church of St. Bride, rising grey against the blue sky beween the hills of St. Denis and St. John. Then the driver whipped up his horses, and we went along gaily as though there were heart in the matter.

"A bridegroom and no husband!" I kept repeating to myself for the strangeness of the thing bewildered me. Then I sprang to the ground, and lifting the lady from the coach, led her to the church.

"I would see your face," I whispered at the portal.

But she was resolute, giving me only her hand to kiss.

I scarce knew what followed, since I was like

one in a dream; but when we turned from the altar my lady lifted her veil a little and presented me her cheek.

- "Thus I keep my pledge," she said.
- "I will keep mine," I answered, and caught her in my arms, kissing her cheek, not once but many times until she struggled and was free of me.
- "You are my husband and a man of honour," she said, "and so you will keep your pledge."
- "I would to God that I was your lover as indeed I am," I burst out, striving to catch her to my heart.

But she put her hand on my breast, pushing me back, and tenderly enough withal, as I thought.

- "Spare me," she said, "since I am but a woman and weak."
- "You are my wife," I returned, catching her hand.
- "'Tis true that I am, and for that I am grateful, seeing that you have saved me. Yet an hour ago you swore that you loved no woman and were not like to. And so we part."
  - "And shall I have no heir to my name?" I

burst out hotly, since in truth it grew hard to leave her.

She turned her face from me.

"I cannot tell," she whispered, so low that I scarce caught the words.

What further I might have urged I know not, for suddenly I heard a great uproar, with much noise and shouting without. While I listened the lady caught my arm, and so together we went out into the sunlight.

"Make haste, gentlemen, make haste to the wedding!" cried the sacristan, handling the last of my guineas.

For a moment the sun blinded me; then I saw a company of gentlemen on horseback, waiting before the church, and amongst them I espied Rody Macnamara, and young Roger Lestrange. They swept off their hats, bowing before us, but I saw confusion and amazement on their faces, as though they looked for another bridegroom.

I turned to the lady, begging to know her desire; but before she could answer a coach drawn by six horses very gaily harnessed drove through the company and halted before the

church. The door was quickly opened, and a gentleman stepped from it. He was very richly dressed in a plum-coloured coat, slashed with silver, and jewels sparkled on the hilt of his sword. At first I thought him a stranger, but when he turned his head I cried out in wonder:

" Jack Vernon!"

"It is my cousin," whispered the lady.

For a few moments he stood regarding me in surprise and anger. Then, as though he remembered his breeding, he took his hat from his head and knelt before the Lady Frances.

- "Forgive me," he said, "if I have been slow in coming, but indeed it is not yet noon. It grieves me to have kept you waiting."
- "You are forgiven, sir," she answered, "since we waited only for the God-speed of a kinsman."
- "I do not understand," he returned, and his face was full of concern.
- "We would have you wish us good luck," she went on.

I marvelled at her calmness.

- "Good luck!" he repeated.
- "Aye, my husband and I."

- "Your husband!" he exclaimed, and his face was dark with anger. "And who may he be?"
  - "A gentleman of honour."
  - "And his name?"
- "Sir Richard Lawless," and she laid her hand on my arm.

For a moment he seemed as though he doubted her words. He took a step backwards, staring at me blankly, and in truth I was not sorry for his discomfiture.

"Let me present to you my husband, Sir Richard Lawless," said the lady very sweetly.

At that he broke into a loud laugh.

"I need no such presentment," he cried, "since this day I won from him five thousand guineas, for which his estate is in pledge."

The blood leapt to my head; I laid my hand on my sword-hilt and would have drawn it had not the lady stood between us.

- "Adieu, Mr. Vernon," said she, "and God give you better manners before we meet again," and she made him a courtesy. Then she turned to me.
- "My lord," she went on very humbly, "I pray you to lead me to my coach."

So I took her hand, and leading her from the church lifted her into her coach. As I did so she bent her head and whispered in my ear:

"Ride with me as far as the Shepherd's Crossing, for I would not have them think you a husband and no lover."

"I shall be both," I said, "and so I will not leave you."

But she shook her head.

"You have pledged your honour to do as I desire," she returned, "and to-day I have no mind for a lover."

"As you will, Madam," I made answer, closing the door of the coach My heart was hot that she should use me so, albeit I had given her an honourable name, and it stung my pride that she should hold me to my pledge to be a husband and no lover.

So I came to a resolve that I would woo her no more, but leave her to die a maid, even though my name might be forgotten for lack of an heir.

Then I turned to the company. They seemed greatly perplexed, as though they knew

not what to make of the matter. But Mr. Jack Vernon I could discern nowhere, albeit the coach with the gilded trappings still lay before the church.

So I made them a low bow, sweeping the air with my hat.

"I would fain entertain you, gentlemen," I said, "but indeed I have pressing business."

Then I leapt into the saddle, and rode after the coach.

"Good luck to your business!" cried Rody Macnamara, and the sound of their laughter followed me.

I went slowly, keeping my lady's coach in sight. When it reached the Shepherd's Crossing it halted, and in a little while I drew rein beside it.

- "I have kept my pledge, Madam," I said taking my hat from my head, "and now I bid you adieu."
- "Adieu?" she repeated; "'tis an unkind word."
- "I can find none more agreeable," I retorted, for I was weary of being fooled by a woman.

- "Yet you are my husband," she went on; and, as I remembered after, the word was spoken softly.
  - "I would fain forget it," I said coldly.
- "And your wife?" she broke out with some warmth. "Is it an easy matter?"
- "It may well be, seeing that I have not seen her face," I made answer.

She lifted her hand to her veil, then dropped it again.

- "And have no desire to see it?" she said very gently.
- "I confess that I have more thought for a bottle of wine," I returned, lying most bravely, for my heart leapt at the sight of her weakness, yet since I had not wooed her I feared her pride.
- "I have wedded a churl," she broke out, and the tears were in her eyes.
- "Without his asking," I retorted, without looking at her.

At that she blazed up.

- "I will keep my own name," she cried.
- "I care not, so you do mine no dishonour," I replied.

- "You give me me no love," she went on betwixt tears and anger.
- "I have given you an honourable name," I returned.
- "'Tis a cold gift for a woman," she said, playing with her veil.
- "I have no leisure for wooing," I made answer, looking towards the hills.
- "Your shadow darkens the sun," she said haughtily. "I bid you good-day."
- "Good day, and good luck to your journey!"
  And making her a bow I wheeled my horse round and set out for the Manor of Graig.

Now I cannot tell how it came about, but when I saw the coach pass over the hill and disappear amid the Wood of the Beeches, my heart grew heavy, and I felt weak like a man that was long sick. The wine was dead in me, and I could find no joy in living, seeing that my estate was pledged to a man that I hated and my name given to a woman who had flouted me.

So when I came within sight of the manor of Graig, my heart was full of bitterness, because I had lost it through my folly, and because my Lord Garmoy had drunk so deep that he had no thought for the son of his friend.

When I reached my home, I dismounted and went in heavily, calling for wine, and cursing old Brian's withered limbs because the buttered claret was slow in coming. Then I drank deep and my heart grew lighter, because I had more friends than Jack Vernon and a pipe of French wine lay still untouched in the cellar. So I resolved to be merry for thirty days even though I must carry a heavy heart for ever after, since I had no hope to find five thousand guineas anywhere in the world.

Now one day it happened that I rode home from a rout at Kilsallagh. When I reached the Shepherd's Crossing I saw something glitter upon the ground before me, like a jewel in the dust. I leapt from my horse quickly and picked it up, staring at it in wonder. It was a delicate thing of satin broidered with crimson silk and at the end was a little silver buckle. Now albeit I had little skill in such matters, I could not long doubt that it was a lady's garter. Yet I could not think how it had come there, seeing that the buckle was not unfastened. So

I thrust the foolish thing into my breast, and mounting my horse again, I fell to wondering whose it was and whether the lady were comely and young, for that she was of good quality I made no doubt, until at last I was minded to throw the thing away in anger because it had set my thoughts upon a woman again. Yet for all I did not but kept it in my breast and not far from my heart.

I was resolved to make merry with my friends whilst I might, seeing that I had but a little while left me to enjoy their company. But when I had but two days more wherein to the Manor of Graig my home, great melancholy fell upon me because I knew how greatly I loved it. I was half minded to seek out Jack Vernon and fasten a quarrel upon him, so that I might put a ball in his heart before he sat in my father's chair. Then I bethought me that I was promised to sup with Dick Delahunt at Clapook, and for such a business there was none better than he. So I called for my horse, and whilst my blood was still hot, I set out taking the road to the Down of Clapook.

At the branching of the ways, I drew rein a moment to see the sun sink behind the hills. then I turned into the Shepherd's Crossing. Suddenly my heart gave a great leap, for there lying by the roadside I espied such another bit of woman's vanity as I carried in my breast. For a few moments I knew not what to do, so many confused thoughts crowded my brain. Then thrusting it into my breast where lay the other, I turned and, putting spurs to my horse, rode as rapidly as I could through the Wood of the Beeches, towards the church of St. Bride, and never drew rein until I was level with the gate. Then leaving my horse panting at the door, I went softly into the church.

At first, because of the dimness, I could see no one, and a chill fell on my heart, but going a little further I saw a woman kneeling before the altar. Her head was turned away from me, but I could not doubt that it was the Lady Frances whom I had wedded not thirty days before. Noiselessly I crept nearer until I stood beside her. So I waited silently albeit my blood was riotous and my heart hot with passion.

Then she rose up and looked at me, and her face was the most beautiful that ever I saw.

- "You came very silently," she said, and her composure amazed me.
- "Since I would not disturb your prayers," I made answer.
  - "My prayers are said," she returned.
- "God give you a speedy answer to them," I replied, striving to check my heart.
- "They have been answered already," she whispered.
  - "What did you pray for?"
  - "For my husband's return."
- "He has brought you these," I said, drawing the silken garters from my breast.

The blood flamed in her cheeks; her head drooped until it was no higher than my heart. Then I could refrain no longer, but caught her in my arms and kissed her lips.

- "Come!" I cried, "for two days you shall be mistress of my house."
- "I would be mistress of your heart for ever," she murmured.
- "That you shall," I made answer; "but in two days my home passes to a stranger."

"That indeed it shall not," she broke out. Then looking at me very proudly, she placed a paper in my hand.

"'Tis a wedding gift," she whispered.

I glanced at it a moment, and knew that she had paid the debt.

Then I caught her in my arms again.

"You shall be mistress of my heart and of the Manor of Graig, for ever," I said.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE BROKEN SWORD-BLADE

How Sir Aylmer Vallance foiled his Kinsman and got him a new Blade

My cousin, Rupert Delaney, was a hard man and his hand heavy. Since he was my nearest kinsman, and was twenty years longer in the world than I, he took the oath, when my father lay a-dying with Roger Blake's ball in his lung, to guard my life and estate, and to train me in the way of honour. Yet he never loved me, but was angry to think that when I was come to the years of a man, I should sit in my father's chair and take account of the guineas, whether I was a man or a craven.

So I could do nothing that was right in his eyes but strove with him continually, and near always to my own hurt, since I had but the strength of a child to back a child's wit. And

thus I grew up weary of fighting and loving peace greatly, so I could find it in no disagreement with the honour of a gentleman. And this I was jealous enough of as Rupert Delaney had cause to learn after. Yet, when he was in his cups he loved to chide me, bidding me go play with the petticoats, since I was my mother's child, and he could discern naught of my father's spirit in me. And when once I drew upon him, being mad at his taunting, I could have sworn that his face grew, an instant, paler. Then he burst into a harsh laugh, and cried out:

"What, would the chicken prick me!"

Then he seized the little sword, which was but a toy after all, and snapped the blade in his strong fingers.

"The distaff and the spinet are fitter for your fingers than the sword," he said. "Go, boy, and play with the women."

But at that I suddenly lost my fear of him.

"I will not," I burst out, "since I am the master of Claremoyle, or shall be when God has given me strength and stature to defend myself against them that hate me for no just cause."

He looked at me strangely as though my passion were new to him, as indeed it was.

- "I doubt you will ever have the heart to face the pistol or the spirit to fasten a quarrel upon any man," he retorted.
- "I have spirit enough, God knows, if my hands were not so weak," I made answer as bravely as I might, but indeed I was not far from tears for my own helplessness.
- "I am not your enemy but your kinsman," he said, as though he would justify himself.
- "I would that God had given me one that was kinder," I returned.

After that he chid me no longer, yet his hate of me did not abate, but I think grew stronger albeit he was more silent. So I grew weary of his dark looks and heavy eyes. He drank deep too and mostly with only the candles and his own thoughts for company, since he had little mind for jest and laughter.

Yet women loved him and accounted him handsome despite his dark looks and fearsomeness, doubtless admiring his strength, since he was the strongest man that ever I knew and of great stature. But for all that he was no great fighter, and though he had been more than thirty years in the world he had laid his man but five times, three times in the Friar's Field and twice with point-blankers on the Down of Clapook. And this he did, I think, more for the honour of his name than because he took pride in his pistols, and since he was little given to comradeship, there was less occasion for quarrel.

So he taught me none of the things which a gentleman has need to know, and despite the oath that he made to my father he would have left me to grow up in ignorance and without skill with sword or pistol. And so I might have done had I not so greatly desired to be even with him, remembering the dishonour he had done me in the matter of the sword when he had snapped the blade in his fingers.

Thus it was that, albeit I had hated the sight of a pistol since the day when my father came to his death by it, I conquered my fear, learning to shoot straight, in secret, until at last I grew to love the barkers and to take pride in them because they served me so well, and with the sword I

was near as cunning of fence as Rody Macnamara himselt.

This gave me great heart so that I cared less for my cousin's dark brow, but looked him boldly in the eyes when I met him, so that he seemed disconcerted as though he hid a secret from me, other than his hate, which indeed was no secret but very plain to every one.

So the knowledge of my skill made me bold and careless how I might anger him. And when I left Claremoyle I would buckle my sword about me, with a great appearance of business, examining the blade with much care lest there should be rust upon it. One day as I did so I saw his eye fixed darkly upon me.

- "'Tis a good-looking blade," he said.
- "Aye, there is no flaw in it," I returned as calmly as I could, for his manner surprised me.
- "You have no thought of fleshing it?" he went on, smiling grimly.
- "How can I tell, but when I do I have good hope to prove that it is no toy but worthy of a man," and I looked him in the face.

His colour grew darker at my words, and I looked for a burst of anger.

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"I do not doubt it," he said calmly, "since Rody Macnamara declares that you are the skilfullest swordsman in the country, and you but sixteen years of age."

I felt my heart leap with pleasure, but I would not let him know how his words pleased me.

"I cannot tell you how that may be," I retorted, "but I think with the service of a good blade, I can defend my life against an enemy, if he fight fair."

"What," he cried, pretending amazement, have you found enemies abroad?"

"'Tis no easy matter to discern a friend from an enemy," I made answer, "and so I go prepared."

"Why, indeed, so it is not." Then as though he struggled with himself, he broke out,—"I have done you wrong, Aylmer, I confess it, thinking you faint-hearted and unworthy of our common blood. Let us be friends," and he held out his hand.

But his words gave me little assurance of his love, and the pressure of his hand was cold and unfriendly.

"I am not quarrelsome," I returned, "and so I desire to be no man's enemy."

"They are cold words to a kinsman."

"They shall be warmer when I can put my heart into them," I made answer; "but indeed the thing is very sudden, and my heart is little acquainted with love."

His eye flashed suddenly upon me as though he would resent my words; then he passed his hand over his brow.

"Let it be as you will," he said, "for I have not been wont to offer my friendship lightly or to find it scorned. Your father was a man of hot and generous blood, but yours is cold as a mountain stream."

"The thing is very sudden," I repeated, wondering why I did not warm to him; "but if it please you, call for wine and I will drink you to our friendship."

"You are the master of Claremoyle," he returned; "so let the wine be brought at your bidding."

Then I called for wine and drank in buttered claret to our friendship. When he had set down the cup, I saw that it was still full and that he had not drunk a drop, albeit he loved wine greatly. Then I went to the window and watched for a moment the sun setting behind the hills. When I turned again there was a splash of red upon the floor and my cousin's cup was empty.

- "'Tis good wine," I said.
- "I never drank better," he returned.

Then I knew that he was false to me and that I must guard myself against a hidden enemy.

But after this, my cousin never ceased striving to win my love, declaring often that when kinsmen quarrelled there was little hope of the race. And he would tell me tales of his youth, praising my father for his honour and gentleness, and yet in such a manner that it made me angry to think on afterwards. Yet strive as he might he could not blot from my memory the recollection of the stain that the claret had made upon the floor when his lips refused to drink to our friendship.

One day as I was leaving Claremoyle, my cousin met me. He was travel-stained and seemed weary; his dark eyes were sunken and

his face lean and defiant. I drew aside to let him pass, and he strode on without looking at me. Then he turned suddenly and a smile like moonlight on the waters passed over his face. "Why, Aylmer," he said, "I had near forgot my courtesy."

"I had not noticed the omission," I retorted, tightening my sword-belt.

The gesture caught his eye. He smiled.

- "You are going abroad, cousin, and like a wise man you go armed."
- "Tis a good blade," I returned proudly, "and if it gain me no friends, it may perhaps rid me of an enemy."
- "You are very wise for your years, Cousin Aylmer," he said, mocking me.
  - "You have been my tutor," I broke out.
- "'Tis a good blade indeed," he went on, "yet I pray that you have no need to use it."
- "If I have, you shall have no cause to be ashamed of your kinsman," I retorted.

He made me a bow and went on.

So I went out with my heart hot and my mind bewildered. Then I leaped into the saddle, and rode under the beeches, spurring my horse so that he might keep pace with my thoughts. When I reached the Valley of the Pines, I was calmer and I rode more slowly, being indeed fallen into thought. The west wind blowing into my teeth had cooled my anger, and the sad weariness of my cousin's face almost stirred me to pity.

So absorbed was I in my reflections, that I scarce noted the clatter of a horse's hoofs behind me, until a fellow rode by scanning my face insolently. Then he drew rein beside me.

"I am a poor gentleman," he said roughly, "and would have gold to lighten the burden of life."

"I have little to do with your poverty," I returned, "but here is a guinea to drink my health."

He flung the gold piece to the ground.

"You would insult me, sir," he broke out, laying his hand on his sword-hilt.

"That I would not," I replied, "but I find my thoughts more agreeable than your company."

"You are Aylmer de Vallance?" he inquired.

"I will keep the name till I disgrace it," I made answer, smiling.

"Then you shall pay for the insult," he cried, wheeling his horse round and riding at me.

The thing was so sudden that I had scarce time to draw my sword and parry his thrust. He went past, and wheeling his horse about with some skill rode at me again, striking vigorously. He had but little cunning in swordsmanship, so I thought to give him a lesson, and laugh at him when he was foiled. So I defended myself, having no desire for his blood. He seemed impatient to end the business, and came upon me with so much foolhardiness that I could scarce refrain from killing him.

"I would not kill you," I said, while he paused for breath, "and the play wearies me."

He looked at me doubtfully, and in his eyes was some shame.

"I am sworn to kill you," he returned gloomily, "and I had thought it were easier."

"How have I wronged you?" I asked in wonder.

"I have never set eyes on you before," he made answer. "I would to God it were otherwise, but since you are the master of Claremoyle, you are my enemy."

"'Tis a strange reason," I retorted, "but since you will have it so, put up, for I am weary of the business."

"You are a brave gentleman," he said, riding at me. Then our swords clashed. He struck at my breast. Parrying the thrust my blade broke and I was at his mercy. He hesitated a moment, then the steel went through my breast with a sharp stinging pain. I saw his face look into mine with great concern. Then I fell wearily into the dust.

How long I lay there I know not, but I think that I dreamed of the clatter of hoofs and the rolling of wheels. A lantern flashed suddenly in my eyes, and beyond it I saw dimly a coach with four horses yoked to it. The door was open, and beside it stood a gentleman. He was dressed in a dark coat with scarlet waistcoat, and his face was sad yet very noble. Behind him looked forth from the coach the face of a woman, fairer and more tender than

ever I had seen. I strove to rise and greet them, but the pain in my breast stabbed me so that I fell back and remembered no more.

For many days afterwards I lay upon the borders of death, and had no thought to ask where I was and who had desired to save me, but all the while the figure of a lady clad in white mocked my dreams. The physician was dull and earnest, and when I would learn who my host was, he shook his head, counselling sleep. But I grew weary of sleep craving the sun's light, and longing for a horse to carry me over the hills again.

The chamber wherein I lay was large and richly furnished. Above my head was carved a peer's coronet, and my eyes grew weary with watching it and wondering whose guest I was.

"If I die 'twill make no matter whose guest I am," I muttered half to myself, "but if I live, I shall be in debt for my life." Then I bethought me of my cousin Rupert, and the blood flooded my temples. "He shall never be master of Claremoyle," I burst out passionately and sprang up in my bed. Then I fell back shamed and confused because of my vehemence.

At the door of the chamber, where the sunlight fell, stood the lady, her hand half lifted as though she would counsel silence; then she turned her head, and my heart stood still fearing that she would leave me. But she did not, and smiling very sweetly, came a little nearer.

- "I fear that your wound mends slowly, sir," she said, and the lark sang in her voice.
- "The wound is in my heart, Madam," I returned.
- "In your heart, sir!" she exclaimed as though she were strangely puzzled.
- "Since this poor body is so helpless a burden, and I know not whom to thank for so great a service," I made answer, watching her and wondering it her hair were gold or brown.
- "What would you learn, sir?" she inquired, looking away from me.
  - "The name of my hosts," I replied.

At that she laughed outright.

"Tis an easy service to render," she cried.

"This is Lahore Castle, the home of the Lord
Fitzgerald, and I am his only daughter,
Constance."

- "I would that I might kneel and thank you," I broke out.
- "'Twere a foolish courtesy in a sick man, Sir Aylmer."
  - "You know my name!" I said in surprise.
- "Your cousin has shewn great concern for your health," she went on.
  - "What, Rupert!" I burst out.

She bowed her head, and I could have sworn that the blood was hot in her cheeks.

- "He loves me greatly," I said bitterly.
- "Aye, that indeed he does," she answered, with warmth. "I know not how often he has declared it."
- "Does he come hither many times?" I asked hopelessly.
- "Scarce a day passes that he does not beg for news of you," she answered reproachfully, "since he feared greatly that you would die."
- "There are things harder to bear than death," I repeated coldly.
  - "I weary you," she said proudly.
  - "I was half dead of loneliness," I retorted.
- "You are still very sick, sir," she said, with great compassion.

- "I cannot tell how my sword broke," I said, for the thing was long in my mind.
- "'Tis strange," she returned, "and my father wondered when he looked on the blade."
- "Is the blade here?" I cried eagerly, "it broke at the hilt."
- "No longer," she replied, "since your cousin took it away lest it should grieve you when you saw it."
- "He loves me very greatly!" I said slowly.
  - "That indeed he does," she made answer.

Then I must have swooned from weakness or fallen into a sleep, since when I opened my eyes she was gone and there was no longer any sunlight in the chamber.

After that, the Lady Constance came no more to visit me, albeit I watched eagerly for her coming, until at last I knew that she would not come again. Then I grew impatient to return to Claremoyle, since I knew that I had displeased her beyond forgiveness, but my Lord Fitzgerald watched me tenderly, swearing that I should never leave Lahore until I was a whole man, since he had no mind to be the first

to dishonour his name, and turn a sick man from his door.

So I yielded unwillingly enough, and begged him to believe me grateful. At length when my woundwas become but a red scar, and mystrength came back to me, I looked from the window and beheld a horse saddled before the Castle. Then I went down to the Hall, and my lord and I drank wine together, while the Lady Constance stood by with her eyes downcast, and her delicate fingers restless. Holding the wine-cup in my hand, I watched her face.

- "Is it a toast?" asked my lord, smiling.
- "That it is, my lord. I bid you drink to the Flower of Womanhood," and I bowed low before the lady.

The blood rose to her brow. She made me a courtesy.

- "I thank you, sir," she said softly, and then she sighed.
- "You have an enemy somewhere in the world," said my lord, "and so will you go not unprepared. I beg you to accept this in place of the blade which has betrayed you," and he placed a sword in my hands.

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"I thank you, my lord," I answered, kneeling and kissing the blade, "and I swear that I shall do it and your lordship's friendship no dishonour."

Then I kissed the lady's hand and bowing to them both I leapt into the saddle and rode away, taking the road to Claremoyle. As I climbed the hill, I turned and looked back. At the door of the Castle I saw the flutter of white. So I swept off my hat and bowed. Then I entered the Wood of the Beeches.

The thought of the Lady Constance and of how my churlishness had lost me her smile, made my heart heavy, and I was minded no longer to treat my cousin with civility, as I had been used but as an enemy, who took what was mine and gave me no love for it.

Being sunk in thought I scarce noted a horseman who rode ahead of me, until I was near level with him. He rode well enough albeit his heavy shoulders were bent and ungraceful. Then the sluggish blood leapt to my head and I could have cried out for joy because but a dozen paces lay between me and my vengeance. I drew the sword, which my Lord

Fitzgerald had newly given me, and spurring my horse, rode after him.

The fellow turned and regarded me carelessly a moment; then the colour forsook his cheeks, terror blinded his eyes and he reeled in the saddle.

"Play the man," I cried, "for the little that is left you of life, since I would not slaughter a sheep."

He clutched at the rein and drew his sword with a quavering hand, but in an instant it flew from him and he tumbled in the dust.

I sprang from the saddle and with my foot on his breast I pricked his throat with the point of my sword. I felt his body quiver, then he opened his eyes.

- "A secret for my life," he murmured with dry lips.
- "If it be not of greater value than your life, take it with you, whither you are going," I retorted impatiently.
- "Give me leave to rise and you shall hear, sir," he answered.

I scanned his face, seeking treachery, but saw only fear and a great eagerness.

- "I wish evil to no man," he began.
- "I doubt not that you are too good for this world," I returned, smiling grimly.
- "But I am poor and a gentleman tempted me." he went on.
- "A noble gentleman," I said; "what is his name?"

He hesitated a moment and I lifted my sword, threatening him.

- "Rupert Delaney," he burst out.
- I broke into a loud laugh.
- "He chose a sorry ruffian for his purpose" I said; "and what was the price of your service?"
  - "Fifty guineas."
- "Ha! did he value my life at so much? I had not thought he would do me so much honour. What is your name?"
  - "Donald Blane, sir," he answered humbly.
- "Has he not yet paid you?" I asked watching his face.

At that he shook his head.

"Donald Blane," I said, "nature has made you too tender for a villain, and so you have lost your fifty guineas, since I am alive and like to live albeit you have worn a sword. Will you serve me instead of my cousin?"

He looked at me full of doubt and bewilderment.

- "What would you have me do?" he asked, trembling with hope.
- "No very dangerous task," I returned: "there are ten guineas, and you shall have a hundred more if you serve me faithfully."

Greed glittered in his eyes, so that I knew that it was need and desire of the guineas that made him a man of action.

"For three hundred days you shall lie in the village of Duisk, secretly but taking note of all those who enter the inn. When one wears a blue riband on his saddle bow, stand before him; he will give you a message, and if you value your life and the guineas be sure you obey it."

He made as though he would kiss my hand, but I spurned him from me, and mounted my horse. But as I rode away, he ran after me.

- "Sir," he cried, "have a care for your sword lest it break again."
  - "How so?" I asked.

"Since I would never have drawn against you, had I not known that the blade would snap."

"I think it saved your life," I returned calmly. "Adieu and remember."

Then I rode on and left him.

When I reached Claremoyle, I found my cousin in the great hall, drinking the buttered claret. His eyes were heavy and his face flushed. He rose quickly as I entered and made as though he would embrace me, but I waved him off.

"Cousin," I said, "your love needs no protesting."

"You were always a churl, Aylmer," he retorted angrily, "and yet I am rejoiced that you have returned safe."

"Since you would not be a murderer," I made answer, looking him in the eyes.

A grey pallor overspread his face and his hand trembled, lifting the wine.

"I am your guest," he said weakly.

"And, doubtless, would fain be host," I went on smiling. "You came near to being master of Claremoyle, and so you would

have been had Donald Blane been a villain of parts."

He lifted his hands.

- "Donald Blane!" he repeated in a whisper.
- "Had you been less niggard of your guineas, you might have put more heart into him. Now he will serve a new master."
  - "A new master!" he repeated.
- "Since he is pledged to my service; an easier service, since murder will be no part of it."

I might have pitied his brokenness had I not remembered the Lady Constance, but the remembrance steeled my heart.

"Aylmer, if you cannot forgive, be silent," he cried, stretching out his hands, "for the honour of our name."

I looked at him pitilessly.

"Rupert, once I might have loved you," I said coldly, "but you would not. After that I feared you. Now I neither love nor fear you. For the honour of our name I will be silent concerning your villainy, as long as suits my purpose."

He would have caught me, but I laid my

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hand upon my sword. Then I went out and left him.

After this I saw but little of my cousin, and since neither of us had any love for the other. 'twas no difficult matter to refrain from But that he drank deep, and with courtesies. only the candles for company I knew, and his vears seemed to grow apace. And this did not amaze me, since he had ever loved wine greatly, but I was puzzled seeing him dress himself He had been wont to wear rich, plain clothes, elegant yet sober withal. But now he seemed to love finery, and albeit he had as fine a figure as ever I saw, his gay-coloured doublet and hose consorted strangely ill with his gloomy face and heavy brow. And that this was so, I think he was not ignorant, seeing how he shunned my eyes, and my smile seemed to madden him.

But one day it happened that he came in jauntily, and his eyes were bright so that I marvelled what good thing was befallen him. When I would have passed him he laid his hand on my arm.

"We are kinsfolk, Aylmer," he said.

- "I am not like to forget it," I made answer.
- "Your voice gives me little assurance of love," he went on.
  - "I would not deceive you," I retorted.
- "I would have you give me joy," he said, watching me narrowly, "since I am to be wed on the morrow."
- "Wed?" I cried, for I had not thought of this: "and what lady would you make so happy?"
- "The Lady Constance Fitzgerald," he replied, his brow flushing.

A chill fell on my heart. I could not answer him, but turning to the window I looked out upon the mountains. He had plotted to destroy my life and had gone unpunished. Should he triumph and leave me covering my face with my hands? My heart grew hard against him.

- "When shall you wed the lady?" I asked.
- "At the church of St. Bride at noon," he made answer.
  - "I shall be there," I said.

He looked at me doubtfully.

- "Let the past be forgotten, Aylmer," he went on eagerly, "since I love her dearer than my honour."
  - "'Tis easy to believe," I retorted bitterly.
- "Let the past be forgotten," he repeated, his face working.
- "I think only of the present and of the future," I replied.
- "What would you do?" he asked, and the sweat stood on his brow.
- "What else but follow my kinsman to the church of St. Bride?" I returned.
- "You will be silent?" he cried brokenly, stretching out his hands.

But I flung them off.

"The matter wearies me," I said, "and I have business."

So I left him, and without delay despatched a messenger secretly to the inn of Duisk to bid Donald Blane come to the church of St. Bride at noon. Then I mounted my horse and rode over the hills, seeking to lighten the weight of my heart, for I had thought to wed the Lady Constance one day when she had forgotten my churlishness.

In the morning I dressed myself gaily for the wedding, and calling for wine I waited for my kinsman. But he did not come, and when it was within an hour of noon, I grew impatient. So I sought his chamber, having it in my mind to chide him for a laggard, for I was resolved not to be cheated of my revenge. When I entered the chamber, I drew back in sudden horror, for before me I saw the figure of my cousin stretched upon the floor. He was dressed most gaily in a blue velvet coat, slashed with silver, and cream-coloured waistcoat. I knelt beside him and lifted his hand, but it was heavy and cold. Then I knew that he was dead.

For a moment the suddenness of the thing robbed me of the thought of vengeance. Then I remembered, and leaving the chamber, I went out and threw myself into the saddle. So I rode with all speed to the church of St. Bride.

A great company was gathered about the church and amongst them I saw the Lord Fitz-gerald. Then as I came nearer I caught sight of a pale sad face, which looked from the

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window of a coach. Sweeping off my hat, I bowed low to the Lady Constance, and I could have sworn that the sight of me brought the colour to her cheeks. A little behind I saw the face of Donald Blane eagerly fixed on me. So I sprang from my saddle and approaching my Lord Fitzgerald, I made him a bow.

- "You are welcome, sir," said he coldly, "but in truth we had looked for another, Rupert Delaney."
  - "He will not come, my lord," I answered.
- "Will not come!" my lord repeated; "what, will he dare?"
- "A dead man may dare anything without fear of punishment, my lord," I made answer.
  - "A dead man?" he cried, in amazement.
- "Even so, my lord," I returned, drawing him aside. "I left my kinsman as dead as last year's dead leaves, and since I owed him no kindness, I confess to no sorrow."
- "'Tis very sudden!" he said, glancing at the coach.
- "I pray that the Lady Constance will not grieve greatly," I went on.

"Grieve!" he broke out; "that she will not any more than for a stranger, since Rupert Delaney was of my choosing since I knew none else that was worthy of her. 'Tis a sore blow, and he loved her."

"My lord," I said proudly, "I am the head of my house and my honour is unstained."

"I doubt not that it is," he returned in some surprise. "What would you?"

"My lord, I too love the Lady Constance," I made answer, "and so I would have you give me leave to woo her, for I swear that if she do not marry me, I will die unwed."

He looked a moment at me in silence, as though he dreamed; then he gave me his hand.

"I had not thought of it, Sir Aylmer," he said. "Go to her, since I will never choose a husband again for her."

So I went to the coach and throwing open the door I knelt and kissed the lady's hand. She looked at me kindly but very sadly.

"I hope that your wound is healed, sir?" she said.

"That it is, Madam," I returned; "but I

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have another wound which will not mend, unless you heal it."

"And that, sir?" she asked softly.

"In my heart, Madam," I said, looking into her eyes.

The blood coloured her pale cheeks, and her eye-lids drooped.

I caught her hand.

"Will you heal the wound, Madam?" I cried, "for I swear that I love you."

"Alas, I cannot," she murmured brokenly,

"'tis too late."

"And wherefore?"

"Since I am pledged at this very hour."

"To Rupert Delaney?" I asked.

She bowed her head, sobbing.

"Madam," I cried, "you are absolved from the pledge, since Rupert Delaney will not come."

"Will not come!" she repeated joyfully, so that I could not doubt any longer that she had never loved him.

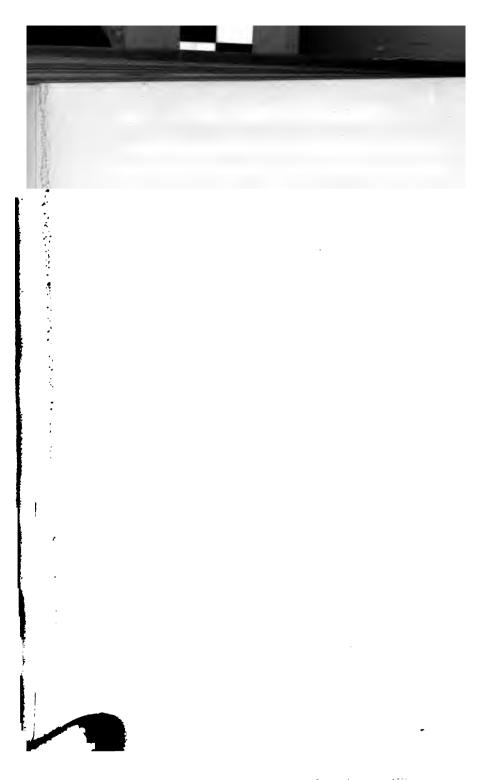
"And so I have come in his stead," I went on.

Her head drooped until it rested on my shoulder. Then I caught her in my arms and

kissed her, while the company shouted aloud and the bells began to peal for our wedding.

But the secret of the broken blade is buried with Rupert Delaney in the Friar's Field, and Donald Blane is become a silent monk of the Black Cloister.

#### THE END



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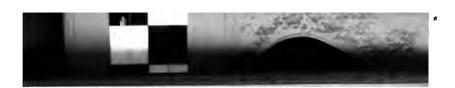
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